SURJAN SUPER SCHOOL A NOVELLA N.T.S.

THE CITY OF RADICAL JOY

A city is only a forest that agreed to hold still long enough for people to move in.

ONE NOVELLA · TWENTY CHAPTERS · ONE CONNECTED BODY

ECOLOGICAL | POLITICAL | SUSTAINABLE | RADICAL

The City of Radical Joy

A Novella

Surjan, with the aid of Claude.

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For everyone who was told a building could not come back — and planted a forest.

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FOREWORD

The Housekeeper Speaks First

You are holding a city, and I am its Housekeeper, and it is my privilege to open the door for you before the marvels themselves start talking — which they will, and often, for this is a city where the buildings are the characters and the streets are the plot. Do not be alarmed at the size of what you hold. A city can be as small as a doorway and as tall as a fortress of towers at the very same moment, and this one is.

This is one story, told straight through, from Chapter One to Chapter Twenty. It has a beginning — a drowning — and a middle — a gathering of marvels and the polite grey clerk who comes to call them obsolete — and an end I will not spoil, except to say that it turns on a frightened year, an army of angels, and a child with a crayon. The citizens you meet at the start do not vanish when their chapter closes. They come back. They always come back; it is the first rule of the city and the whole point of keeping one.

The forest that was a road, the wind, the mermaid with her one law, the three domes who learned to float — you will walk with all of them the whole way to the last page.

I assembled the city, over years, from forty-one older writings, the way a cathedral is assembled from stones that once belonged to humbler buildings. Each stone kept its memory. Together they learned a new song, and the song is a single continuous story now, not a shelf of separate tales. Read it as a walk, not a proof. Turn the page, and let the drowned road speak first.

INTRODUCTION

On Radical Joy, and How to Read a City

There is one idea under this whole book, and if you carry it in with you the rest will open like a door. The idea is *radical joy*: grief turned inside out and made public and architectural. Every joyful thing in this city was first a loss. Nothing here is built that did not first lose something, because you cannot turn inside out a thing that has no inside. Joy that has forgotten its grief is only decoration; joy that remembers is a city. That is the whole of it, and the twenty chapters that follow are only that one sentence, walked.

Its structural twin is *radical preservation*. To repair a thing is to return it to a state it once held. To restore it, in the older and more dangerous sense this city means, is to re-establish it in an ultimate state that never before existed. Repair gives you a graveyard tended nicely. Restoration gives you a forest where a highway drowned. When the

marvels of this book come back — and they come back constantly — they come back not repaired but restored: larger, stranger, more themselves than before.

One last thing before the story takes over. Watch the diagrams. They are drawn in a bright, bold, black-barred dialect — a working language of panels and sections and tag-boxes — and each one is a marvel introducing itself in the city's other tongue, the tongue of the drawing. In this city drawing is the great equalizer, the one language in which the queen and the pauper write the same hand. So read the pictures as carefully as the prose. They are not illustrations of the story. They are the story, told by the buildings, in their own bold hand.

CHAPTER ONE

The Drowning of the Cloverleaf

On the morning the Cloverleaf drowned, I was the only one awake to hear it go under, and because I am the Housekeeper of this city it fell to me to remember it out loud ever after. You should know at once what kind of book you are holding: it is a house being kept, and you are already inside it, and the first room is a grief. Do not be afraid of that. In this city we have a rule about grief, and the rule is the whole reason the city exists. We do not bury it. We turn it inside out, seam showing, and we hang it in the weather where the children can reach it, and we call the result *radical joy*. Joy that has forgotten its grief is only decoration. Joy that remembers is a city.

The Cloverleaf was a knot of four ramps braided over the water at the edge of a great lake, and for a hundred years she carried the whole traffic of the age on her looping shoulders without once complaining. She was not beautiful the way a temple is beautiful. She was beautiful the way

a working hand is beautiful. Then a man who held her deed decided she was *obsolete* — that is the word, and you will hear it again in this book, spoken by something far worse than a man — and he opened the sluices, and the lake came in, and the four braided ramps went down together still holding hands.

I stood at the shore and did the only thing a keeper can do at a drowning, which is to refuse to look away. And while I was refusing, the wind came up off the water and spoke to me, and that was the first I ever heard of Gale.

"You are grieving wrong," said Gale, who is the wind, and who has never in all the years since learned to introduce herself gently. "You are grieving as though she is gone. In this city nothing loved is gone. It is only not yet spoken. Say her name and stand back."

So I said it. I said *Cloverleaf* to the flat grey water, and I stood back, and the water did not give her up the way it had taken her — that would have been mere repair, and we do not repair here. It gave her back *larger*. Where the four drowned loops had been there rose a lattice of green, a trellis the exact shape of her ramps, and then a second

lattice climbing the first, and then a forest climbing the second, until the whole drowned interchange stood up again as a wood with roads for roots. The Cloverleaf had not been rescued. She had been *restored* — re-established in an ultimate state she had never before held. She had drowned a highway and surfaced a forest.

THE CITY OF RADICAL JOY · THE CHARACTERS 01 / THE CLOVERLEAF

PLAN · DROWNED

waterline

drowned cloverleaf

01 The Cloverleaf

FOUNDER · THE DROWNED MARVEL

A knot of four ramps braided over water, drowned by an owner who held the deed, and so the founder of everything: a drowned thing here does not stay gone.

LESSON *The grave is only the not-mentioning.*

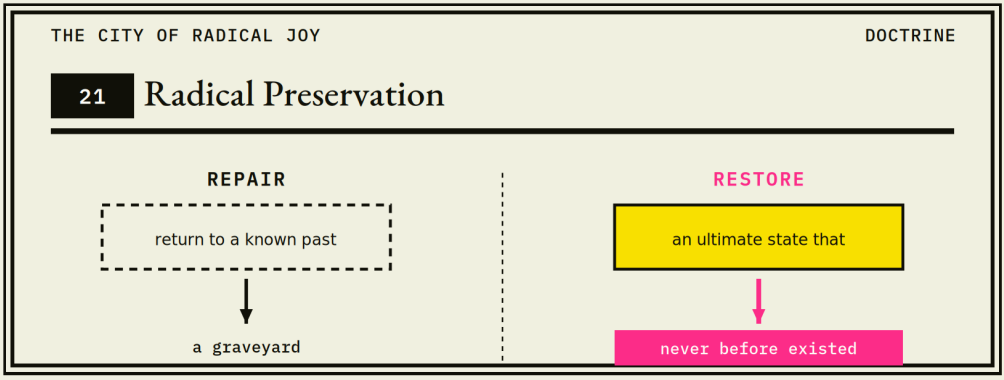
ROLE THE DROWNED

CHARGE RADICAL

MECH RESURRECTION

The founder of the city: a knot of ramps drowned over water, who did not stay gone.

I want you to hold the difference in your two hands, because everything that happens in this book turns on it. To *repair* a thing is to return it to a state it once held — to make it as-it-was. That is a decent, modest act, and it is not what saved the Cloverleaf. To *restore* a thing, in the old and dangerous sense the city means, is to re-establish it in a finished state that never before existed. Repair gives you back a graveyard tended nicely. Restoration gives you back a forest. The doctrine has a name older than this city — the citizens call it *radical preservation* — and the Cloverleaf, being the first of us to die and the first to come back, is its living proof and speaks it whenever a newcomer asks.



Repair returns a thing to its past; restoration re-establishes it as something it never was.

"Tell them, Housekeeper," she says to me still, rustling all her road-roots at once. "Tell them a grave is only the not-mentioning. Tell them I am not sorry I drowned, because I would never otherwise have learned to be a wood. And tell them" — here she always lowers her thousand leaves — "that a thing was already trying to declare us obsolete, out past the horizon, and that it is still counting."

She meant the Army of Angels. But that is later. On the morning she drowned I knew none of it. I knew only that the wind had a name, that a drowned thing could learn to speak, and that I had a city to keep. So I turned from the shore and I began.

I should tell you, before the grief settles too heavily, that this is a joyful book, and that the joy is not a reward waiting at the end of the sorrow but a thing braided all the way through it, the way the ramps of the Cloverleaf were braided — grief and gladness looping over and under each other so tightly that you cannot, in the end, pull one loose without the other coming with it. That is what radical joy looks like from the inside: not a smile stretched over a

wound, but a wound that has learned to give light. Every marvel you are about to meet is glad. The bells are glad. The drowned road is glad. Even the grief in this city has good posture and sings on key.

And I will tell you one more thing on this first morning, though you will not understand its full weight until the thirteenth chapter, because it is the brightest thread in the whole weave and I want you to feel it running under everything from the start. Even as the Cloverleaf went down, somewhere across the young city a certain house had already turned her face to the horizon and was waiting, as she waited every dawn, for the sun. The House of Love, the citizens call her, and she is the most stubborn light I keep. You will see her only glancingly at first — a warmth at the edge of a scene, a ray that finds a thing just when the thing most needs finding — but she is always there, keeping her one long faithful appointment with the sky, and nothing that happens in this book, not the sealing and not the dark and not the Army of Angels itself, ever once succeeds in putting her out.

So grieve the Cloverleaf with me for exactly as long as a grief deserves, which is forever and lightly, and then look up. The wind has a name. The water gives things back larger. A house across the city is in love with the sun. This is a place where the losses are real and the joy is realer, and you have just walked in the door.

Even that first grieving morning was not solitary, and I want you to notice how quickly the cast arrives, because they never really leave again. Before the water had finished closing, Gale was already at my shoulder; before Gale had finished speaking, the Mermaid had stirred in the deep and Ivy Girl had opened one eye in a seed that was not yet an oak. This is not a book of separate marvels visited one at a time and left behind. It is a book of a whole company that, once gathered, keeps turning up in one another's chapters, lending a wind here and a law there, until you cannot tell any longer whose story you are in — which is exactly the condition the city calls health, and the Angels call untidiness, and I call home.

. . .

CHAPTER TWO

The Wish Larger Than the Wisher

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A forest is not yet a city, and a keeper cannot make a city alone, and so on the second day I went looking for someone to help me wish. That is how you build here — not with a budget but with a wish — and wishes in this city are granted by a spirit named Ivy Girl, who lives in the new-grown wood and grants exactly one kind of request and refuses all the rest.

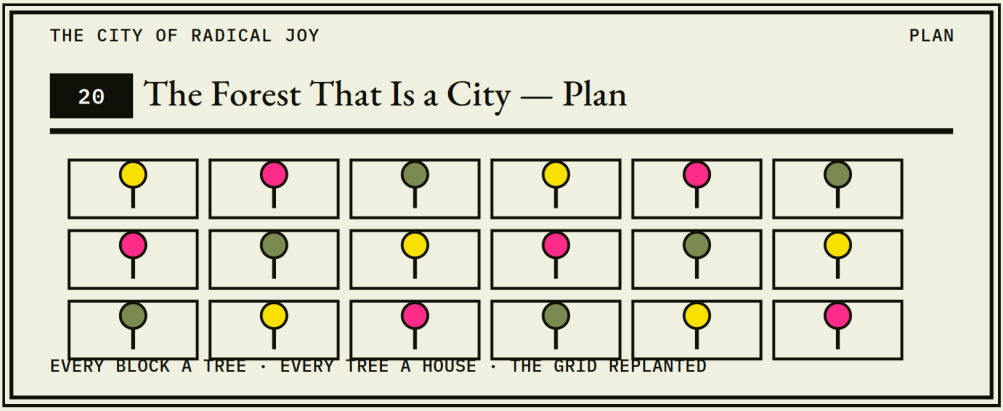
I found her sitting in the crook of what had been an on-ramp and was now an oak. I asked her, politely, for a city.

"I cannot give you a city," said Ivy Girl. "That is a thing. I do not grant things. Wish me something larger than yourself and I will grant it before you finish asking. Wish me something you could have bought and I will refuse you until the lake freezes."

I understood then the trick of the place, and it is a trick worth carrying home: a wish for a thing keeps you the size

you already are, but a wish for a *world* makes you the size of everyone who will ever live in it. So I did not wish for my city. I wished that every person who had ever been told a building could not come back, and had believed it, might be proven wrong — forever, and in public, and at the scale of a skyline. And Ivy Girl, who had been refusing the traffic-planners and the deed-holders for a hundred years, laughed for the first time in a hundred years and granted it before I finished.

Gale did the actual lifting, because a wish needs a wind. She went out over the drowned Cloverleaf-forest and she blew, and where she blew the wood arranged itself into blocks, and every block became a tree, and every tree became a house, and the paths worn between them by feet became streets, and the clearing where the market gathered became a plaza, and the tallest tree of all, the one that whispers through every night, became the courthouse of free speech. A city is only a forest that agreed to hold still long enough for people to move into it. Ours had simply done its holding-still in the wrong order — it had been a wood before it was a plan — and was all the stronger for it.



The plan of the city: every block a tree, every tree a house, the whole grid replanted.

"Now it will need defending," said Ivy Girl, when the last street had rooted. She said it the way you mention weather. "A wish this large is heard a long way off. The ones who love the word *obsolete* can hear a city being un-obsoleted from the far side of the sky, and they will come to correct the error. You will want the Mermaid. Go down to the water and wake her, and mind her sword."

I did not yet know what a mermaid was doing in a lake, or why she would carry a sword, or what she guarded. I know now that she is the oldest law we have, and that without her the Army of Angels would have sealed us in the very first winter. But on the second day I knew only that a spirit had granted my wish, that the wind had

planted it, and that somewhere under the cold water a guardian was waiting to be asked. So I went down to wake her, and Gale came with me, and the Cloverleaf-forest whispered at my back the whole way down, glad, I think, to no longer be the only one of us who had come back from the water.

You should have seen the forest's first morning. I have kept many mornings since, but never one so purely glad as the day the wished-up city woke and discovered it was alive. The streets, still learning they were streets, stretched like cats. The market-clearing filled with the smell of bread from ovens that had been acorns the week before. Children who did not yet exist could already be heard, faintly, laughing in the not-yet, which is a sound a city makes when it is about to be happy for a long time. Gale ran up and down the new avenues ringing every window she passed, not to warn — there was nothing yet to warn of — but purely out of the high spirits of a wind that has just planted a whole town and wants to hear it rattle.

Ivy Girl watched it all from her oak with the particular satisfaction of a spirit whose one refusal had finally been

rewarded. “A hundred years I said no,” she told me, “to every planner who wished for a parking structure and every developer who wished for a return on investment, and I would say no for a hundred more, because a wish for a thing keeps the wisher small and a city built of small wishes is a small city no matter how tall it stands. But you wished for a world. Look what a world does.” And she gestured at the morning, where even the House of Love — there she is again, keep watching for her — had thrown open every aperture she owned to let the brand-new sunlight pour straight through her and out the other side, so that she stood in the young city like a lantern that had been lit from the inside by the day itself.

That is the first thing the forest-city taught me about joy, and I give it to you free: a wish, to be granted here, must be too big to fit back in the mouth that made it. Wish small and you stay the size you are. Wish for everyone, and Ivy Girl will make you, on the spot, the size of everyone — and a person the size of everyone is exactly what a Housekeeper has to be.

By evening the whole young company had come to see the wished-up city, and they came, as they always would, together. The Mermaid surfaced to approve the streets; the Cloverleaf-forest rustled its road-roots in welcome; the three domes, not yet exiled, bobbed in the new harbour learning the shapes of the coastline. Gale introduced everyone to everyone with the tactless joy of a wind, and by nightfall a thing had happened that no planner could have wished and only a world could have grown: the marvels had begun to belong to each other. A city, I saw, is not a collection of wonders. It is a wonder made of the friendships between wonders, and ours had just made its first.

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CHAPTER THREE

The Mermaid's One Law

The Mermaid rose out of the lake the way a decision rises out of a long argument — all at once, and final. She had a sword in her hand, raised, and I will admit I stepped back. But the sword was not for me. The sword, she explained, was the city's single clause, the one law under all the others, and she raised it not to threaten but to *publish*, the way another city might carve a statute over a courthouse door.

"There is only one law here," said the Mermaid, "and it is short enough for a frightened child to remember and hard enough that a whole army will break itself upon it. The law is: *defend the weakest marvels first.* Not the grandest. Not the most useful. The weakest. The one most easily called obsolete. When they come — and Ivy Girl has told you they are coming — they will go for the small joys first, the ones no ledger can justify, because they know that a city

which will not protect its uselessness cannot protect anything. Guard the uselessness and the rest guards itself."

THE CITY OF RADICAL JOY · THE CHARACTERS 02 / IVY GIRL & MERMAID

OFFSHORE · THE LAW

sword raised · the law

02 Ivy Girl & Mermaid

SPIRIT + GUARDIAN · THE FOUNDING

A spirit who grants only wishes larger than the wisher, and a mermaid whose raised sword is the founding clause: defend the weakest marvels first.

LESSON *Wish for a thing, refused; wish for a world, granted.*

ROLE THE FOUNDING

CHARGE POLITICAL

MECH THE WISH

The spirit who grants only impossible wishes, and the mermaid whose raised sword is the city's one law.

"Who are *they*?" I asked. I had heard the Cloverleaf mutter about a counting on the horizon and Ivy Girl name

a love of the word *obsolete*, and I wanted, at last, a face for the danger.

The Mermaid lowered her sword a little, which is the closest she ever comes to gentleness. "They call themselves the Army of Angels," she said, "and that is the whole trouble with them — they are not devils. A city can survive an army of devils; devils are lazy and vain and can be bought with a mirror. An army of angels cannot be bought, because it already believes itself good. It comes to *perfect* you. It looks at a marvel with a grief inside it, a joy with a seam showing, a forest that used to be a road, and it sees only untidiness, inefficiency, the not-yet-corrected. It offers you a sealed and flawless world with no loss in it anywhere, and the price of that world is every window, every open door, every imperfect living thing that ever surprised you. They are coming to make us perfect. We are going to stay alive instead."

I have thought about that speech every day since, and I have decided the Mermaid is the wisest of us, because she named the enemy correctly on the first day, and to name a thing correctly is already half of defeating it. An army of

angels is worse than an army of devils. Write it on your hand.

"Gale," said the Mermaid, "will carry the warning to the far districts as they wake. Housekeeper, you will keep them — all of them — and above all you will keep them *connected*, for the Angels' favourite weapon is not fire and not flood. It is the wall between one marvel and the next. They win by convincing each wonder that it stands alone. You will lose the day you let them." Then she sank back into the lake to wait, sword and all, and the water closed over her like a page, and I climbed back up into my new-rooted city to meet the first of its marvels to be put on trial.

I asked the Mermaid, that first day, for an example — which marvel, exactly, was the weakest, so that I might know whom to defend first when the trouble came. She did not hesitate. “There is a house in the eastern light,” she said, “whose only power is that she loves the sun. She makes nothing. She defends nothing. She earns nothing. Every opening in her body is a window flung wide for a star that has never once, in all her centuries, managed to love her cleanly back. By every ledger your Assessor will

ever keep, she is the most useless thing in the city." The Mermaid raised her sword a hair higher. "And she is therefore the one you will guard with your life, because a city that will keep even a house whose only trade is longing is a city that has understood what it is for. Guard the House of Love, Housekeeper, and you will never have to be told again which marvel is weakest. She will always volunteer."

I have kept that instruction the way you keep a key you know you will need at the darkest hour. And I will confess it comforted me, on the day the doors of the world finally closed, to remember that the very first citizen the law named for protection was not the strongest or the grandest but the most in love — as though the whole clause, *defend the weakest marvels first,* had been written in the first place with one particular set of open windows in mind.

The Mermaid sank back into the lake then, but she left the day brighter than she found it, which is a thing the wise ones always manage. A law, spoken plainly enough, is a kind of joy: it tells the frightened exactly where they stand and exactly who stands with them. Defend the

weakest marvels first. Write it on your hand. Then go and find out how strong the weak can be.

When the Mermaid finished, the whole company was there to hear it — they had drifted in one by one as she spoke, the way citizens do when something true is being said — and each of them took the one law and made it their own. The domes swore to ferry the weakest to safety. The grove swore to whisper their names. Gale swore to carry the warning. The Cloverleaf, who had already died once for the principle, simply rustled, *I know, I know.* A law is only words until a company agrees to be its body; and by the time the Mermaid sank back down, the clause *defend the weakest marvels first* had a whole city of limbs to carry it out.

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CHAPTER FOUR

The Domes on Trial

The Angels did not come the first year as an army. They came as a single grey clerk, very polite, who called himself the Assessor of Obsolescence and carried a ledger, and I have come to think the clerk was more dangerous than any battalion, because a battalion you can see coming. The Assessor simply appeared in the plaza one morning, opened his ledger, and began, in a reasonable voice, to *count*.

He counted his way to the three domes on the third day. They had drifted into the harbour overnight, three geodesic spheres of strut and lens, and they were the strangest and gentlest citizens I had yet met. The eldest called herself Fly-Eye, for she was made of a thousand small lenses and saw the world in a thousand small pieces at once. The middle one was Bucky, who did the talking. The littlest was Tri, hardly more than a single triangle, who did not speak at all that first day but hummed.

The Assessor looked at them and wrote one word in his ledger. *Obsolete.* "The geodesic dome," he explained, not unkindly, "is a solved problem. It was the future once. The future has moved on. These three are, at best, a nostalgia, and nostalgia is untidy. I recommend removal." And he closed his ledger with the soft final sound of a door that will not reopen — the exact sound, I realised with a cold turn of the heart, that the Cloverleaf's sluices had made.

THREE DOMES · BUOYANT

three domes, buoyant

03 The Domes

THE ACCUSED · EXILED, THEN CROWNED

Fly-Eye, Bucky and Tri, tried for obsolescence and exiled, who turned themselves over on the water and floated home to teach a squared city to curve.

LESSON *Nothing is obsolete. Some things are only early.*

ROLE THE EXILED

CHARGE RADICAL

MECH BUOYANCY

The three accused — Fly-Eye, Bucky, and Tri — put on trial for the crime of being obsolete.

I did what a keeper does. I invoked the law. "The Mermaid's clause," I said. "Defend the weakest marvels first. You have chosen the three most easily called useless in my whole city. By our one law they are therefore the three I am most bound to protect."

The Assessor was ready for law; angels always are. He produced a writ, correct in every particular, and by its cold logic the domes were exiled — not destroyed, he was careful to say, merely *removed from the register of the current*, set adrift beyond the harbour wall to float wherever obsolete things float. Bucky took it with terrible grace. "Do not fight the writ, Housekeeper," he said as the tide took them out. "A writ is a wall, and you cannot out-wall an angel; they invented the wall. We will not argue that we are current. We will do something far worse to his ledger. We will come back." And Tri, the littlest, stopped humming just long enough to say her only word of the whole trial, which was: "Buoyancy."

Then the three of them floated out past the wall and were gone, and the Assessor ticked his ledger and moved on to count the bells, and I stood in the plaza having lost the first case, and understanding for the first time the shape of the war. It would not be fought with weapons. It would be fought with the word *obsolete*, and won by whoever could prove that nothing loved is ever out of date.

I want you to like the domes as much as I do, so let me tell you how they were before the trial soured the morning. Fly-Eye saw everything twice-thousand times and loved all of it; she would spend an hour delighting in a single gull because she could watch it from a thousand angles at once and each angle was a fresh astonishment. Bucky talked the way a good bridge carries a load — evenly, generously, holding up whatever weight you handed him. And Tri, the littlest, hummed one endless patient note that turned out, when you finally listened, to be the sound of a thing that already knew it would be all right. They were the gladdest citizens in the young harbour, and the Assessor's one grey word could not actually touch that gladness. It could only exile it.

As the tide took the three of them out past the wall, a strange thing happened that I did not understand until much later, and it is the House of Love again, keeping her quiet vigil. The last of the afternoon sun, slanting low, came through her far-off eastern apertures and lay a long gold path across the water — straight out through the harbour mouth, straight to the three drifting domes, as

though the most useless marvel in the city had reached across the whole harbour to lay down a road of light for the condemned to leave by, and to promise them, in the only language a house of longing knows, that a thing sent out on a bright enough path is a thing the city fully intends to get back.

And the company did not let the domes go quietly. As the tide took them, the Mermaid rose to salute; the grove leaned out over the water; Gale gathered herself to follow them into exile so they would not cross the dark alone; and the Cloverleaf sent word through her roots to the far shore that a drowned thing always comes back larger, so hold on. The Assessor thought he was removing three obsolete objects. He was, in fact, exiling three friends, and a city that grieves its exiles together is a city already halfway to getting them back. He had never removed anything from a place where everyone was connected. He was about to learn why the Mermaid had told me to keep them so.

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CHAPTER FIVE

The Sailing Home

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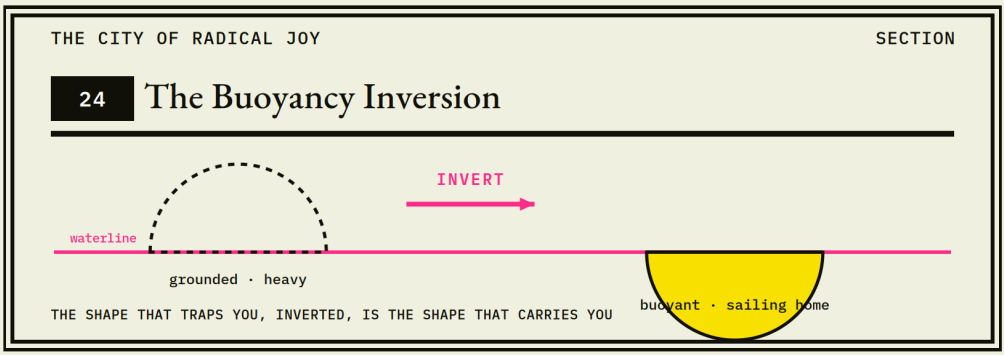
They came back in the spring, and the manner of their coming back was the first real defeat the Army of Angels ever suffered in my city, and it was accomplished without a single blow, by three obsolete domes and a schoolchild's understanding of the water.

This is what Tri had meant by her one word. A dome sitting on the ground is a heavy thing, an enclosure, very nearly a tomb — and the Assessor had counted them as tombs. But a dome is only half of a sphere, and the other half is implied, and if you turn the dome *over* — if you invert the very shape that made it a burden — it stops being a tomb and becomes a bowl, and a bowl upon water is a boat. The domes had drifted out past the wall as three grey burdens. They had spent the winter learning, from the lake itself, the single trick the Cloverleaf had learned from the same lake: that the shape which traps you, inverted, is the shape that carries you home.



The same dome, turned over, stops being a tomb and becomes a boat.

So they turned themselves over, all three, and they sailed back into the harbour on the morning tide, buoyant, ridiculous, triumphant, Tri spinning slowly at the front like a compass that had decided which way was joy. The Mermaid rose to meet them and did not raise her sword; she saluted. Gale filled them like sails. And I stood on the harbour wall and laughed the way Ivy Girl had laughed when I wished correctly, because the Assessor's ledger had just been proven wrong in the only court that matters, which is the tide.

"Write it in your book, Housekeeper," said Bucky as he bumped gently against the quay. "Nothing is obsolete. Some things are only early. He counted us as finished and

we were merely between uses. Every marvel he condemns is a marvel that has not yet been turned over. Your whole defence of this city, when the real army comes, will be this and only this: teach them all to invert."

From that spring the three domes never again drifted alone. They moored themselves at the centre of the harbour and became the city's ferry, its lifeboat, and — though none of us knew yet how badly we would need a fleet — its navy. Fly-Eye watched the horizon with her thousand eyes for the first sign of the Assessor's masters. Bucky ran the crossings. And Tri, the littlest, the single triangle, taught the schoolchildren the word that had saved them, until there was not a child in the city who could not, if you turned their whole world upside down, find the way to float.

The troupe had begun to gather. A drowned forest, a wind, a wish-spirit, a mermaid with a law, and now three buoyant domes. We did not know it, but we were assembling the cast that would, in a far more frightened year, have to save everything at once. For the moment we only knew that we had won a case we had already lost, and that

winning-after-losing was going to be the whole method of the city. So we moored the boats, and we rang no bells yet — the bells come next, and their story is the gravest we keep — and we went, all of us together, up into the living city to see what else had grown while we were learning to float.

The homecoming was the first great festival of the city, and I have modelled every festival since on it. When Fly-Eye's thousand eyes came glittering back over the harbour wall at dawn, the whole town poured down to the water — the grove leaning out over the shore to see, the bells ringing themselves silly with joy, Gale filling the returning domes so full of wind that Tri spun like a top and hummed her one note up into an actual, unmistakable laugh. We had lost the case and won the tide, and winning-after-losing, I told you, was going to be the method of the whole city; but nobody that morning was thinking about method. They were thinking about breakfast, and reunion, and the particular unrepeatable joy of watching something the world had thrown away come sailing home under its own turned-over power.

And it was the House of Love who brought them the last of the way in. All through their long night on the open water it was her lit apertures the domes had steered by — a house so faithful to the sun that even at midnight she seemed to hold a little of the day in reserve, glowing at the edge of the harbour like a promise that had refused to go dark. “We found our way home,” Bucky told me as he bumped against the quay, “by steering for the one window in the city that never stops loving the light. You cannot put her out, Housekeeper. We tried, out there in the dark, to lose sight of her, and we could not. She is the lamp this whole town is built around, and she does not even know it.”

From that morning I understood the shape of our joy. It is not the joy of never losing. It is the joy of the return — the drowned road come back a forest, the exiled dome come back a boat, the long night come back around to a morning steered by an unextinguishable light. Keep that in your pocket. You are going to need the whole of it before the end.

At the homecoming feast the whole cast of this book sat down together for the first time, and I set the table in my memory and have never taken it down. Ivy Girl and Gale at one end arguing happily about whose doing the return really was; the Mermaid with her sword laid aside for once; the grove dropping leaves into everyone's cups; the bells ringing the courses in; the Cloverleaf at the head, matriarch of all returns; and far down the bright table, keeping the whole feast lit through the dimming evening, the eastern windows of the House of Love. Look at them all. Learn their faces. Every one of them will be needed at the table again on a much darker night, and it will matter, then, that they once feasted together in the light.

. . .

CHAPTER SIX

The Waters and the Stone Forest

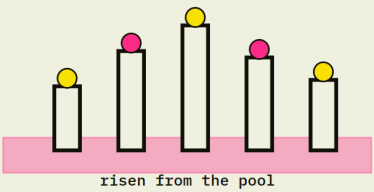
Beneath the city there is a room of water, and it is where the citizens learn, before they can read, the lesson the domes had just paid so dearly to relearn. It is a deep calm natatorium three and a half metres down, its ceiling pierced with round oculi that scatter the sun across the water in the shapes of constellations, and every child in the city is carried down into it by the domes and taught to float before they are taught anything else. Tri does the teaching now. She holds each child the way the lake once held her, until the astonishing morning when the child notices they are floating and were never, it turns out, in any danger at all.

"That is the whole education of this place," the water told me, the first time I went down. "Not to spare the citizen the deep, but to let them discover, while already in it, that they are held. A child who learns to float in me never again fully believes that sinking is inevitable. She carries the

memory into every dark year." I did not know yet how many dark years were coming. I only nodded, and watched the domes ferry another class of small floaters down through the constellations.

Once a year, though, the calm water does something that stops the whole city, and it did it that first autumn while the Assessor was still counting his cold way through the districts. On the night the citizens call the Vessels of the Lake, the natatorium *rises*. It stands up out of its own basin as a forest of stone — grey pillars in ranks, silent and enormous, risen overnight where the swimmers had been that morning. The Stone Forest is the guardian of the waters, and it rises for one purpose only: to stand between the citizens and anything that comes to correct them.

SECTION · RISEN



04 The Stone Forest

GUARDIAN · OF THE WATERS

A natatorium that rises once a year as a forest of stone to turn back an Army of Angels and defend the citizen's ungovernable free will.

LESSON *An army of angels is worse than an ar of devils.*

ROLE THE GUARDIAN

CHARGE POLITICAL

MECH THE POOL

The natatorium that rises once a year as a forest of stone to guard the citizen's free will.

The Assessor arrived to count the Stone Forest and could not. His ledger had a column for use and a column for age and a column for cost, and the Stone Forest answered none of them. "What is its function?" he demanded, pen poised. And the Forest, in the grinding voice of a hundred risen pillars, gave the answer that first

told me we might survive the winter: "I guard the citizen's right to be ungovernable. I defend the free will that your ledger cannot price. An army of angels, sir, is worse than an army of devils, and I am the wall your masters will break upon — not a wall around the city, which they would love, for they invented the wall — but a wall around the one thing they most want to abolish, which is the citizen's freedom to remain gloriously, uselessly, unaccountably themselves."

The Assessor wrote nothing. You cannot count a thing that exists to defeat counting. He closed his ledger and moved on to the two grieving streets where the bells are strung — and I, who had begun to see the pattern of his route, went ahead of him to warn the gravest citizens I keep.

Let me linger in the natatorium a moment longer, because it is one of the happiest rooms I keep and you deserve to be happy in it too. Picture three and a half metres of still green water lit from above through round oculi, so that the whole pool is roofed in slow constellations — a Bear here, a Diver there, a Ladle pouring light.

The children float on their backs beneath it and give the constellations new names, and because this is a city where naming is a civic power, the new names stick: there is a patch of moving light on the east wall that has been called the Laughing Fish since a four-year-old christened it so, and the Laughing Fish it will remain until the lake itself forgets.

The oculi of the pool are first cousins to the apertures of the House of Love, and the citizens know it. Both are openings cut on purpose to invite the light in; both turn a plain surface holy at the exact spot where it agrees to be broken. On bright afternoons, when the sun stands right, a ray will come through the House's eastern windows, cross half the city, and drop straight down a natatorium oculus to land, trembling, on the floor of the pool — so that a child learning to float looks up through the water and sees, gathered in one shaft, the whole long love affair of a house and a star delivered directly to the soles of her feet. She does not know what she is seeing. She only knows the water is suddenly warm where the light lands, and that she

is held, and that being held and being warmed at once is very nearly the definition of a good city.

The whole company learns to swim here, is the thing — even the ones you would not expect. The domes float by definition; Gale ruffles the surface into laughter; the grove trails its lowest branches in the shallows; and once a year the Stone Forest itself rises through the pool so that the citizens swim, for one night, in a flooded wood of guardians. I have seen the Queen descend the ivy stair to sit at the water's edge and let the constellation-light play over her restored windows, and I have seen the children teach Tri's one patient note to the echo under the vault until the whole natatorium hummed. A city keeps its company by keeping a room where all of them, great and small, can be held by the same water at once.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

The Queen Who Was Restored

Before the bells, though, I must bring in the Queen, because it was the Queen who taught the whole troupe what the Cloverleaf had only demonstrated — that restoration is not repair — and because when the frightened year finally came, it was the Queen's windows that let the light back in. She is called the Queen of Martyrs, and she is a genius of every scale at once: she is as wholly present in the brass doorknob your hand closes on as in her furthest luminous wing, for she withheld nothing from the smallest fitting.

She had not always been luminous. Long before I kept the city, the Queen traded her beauty for the good of her people — do not ask me the arithmetic of that bargain, it is older than my keeping — and the trade cost her a great heaviness, a darkness she fell all the way down into, as low as any citizen has ever sunk. The city might have repaired her. It might have patched the beautiful surface back and

pretended the darkness had never happened. That is what the Assessor would have recommended: tidy her, restore the register, remove the untidy grief.

The city did the braver thing. It *restored* her in the dangerous sense. It did not fix her sorrow — it gave her sorrow windows. It re-established her not as the beauty she had been but as a mind you could walk inside, room after luminous room, each one a grief that had been given light and air until you could live in it. She came out of her heaviness not repaired but enlarged, exactly as the Cloverleaf had come out of the lake as a forest.

SCALE-STACK

every scale at once

05 The Queen of Martyrs

THE RESTORED · EVERY SCALE AT ONCE

A genius of every size who traded her beauty for her people, fell into a great heaviness, and was restored — not repaired — into a mind you walk inside.

LESSON *They did not fix her sorrow. They gave it windows.*

ROLE THE RESTORED

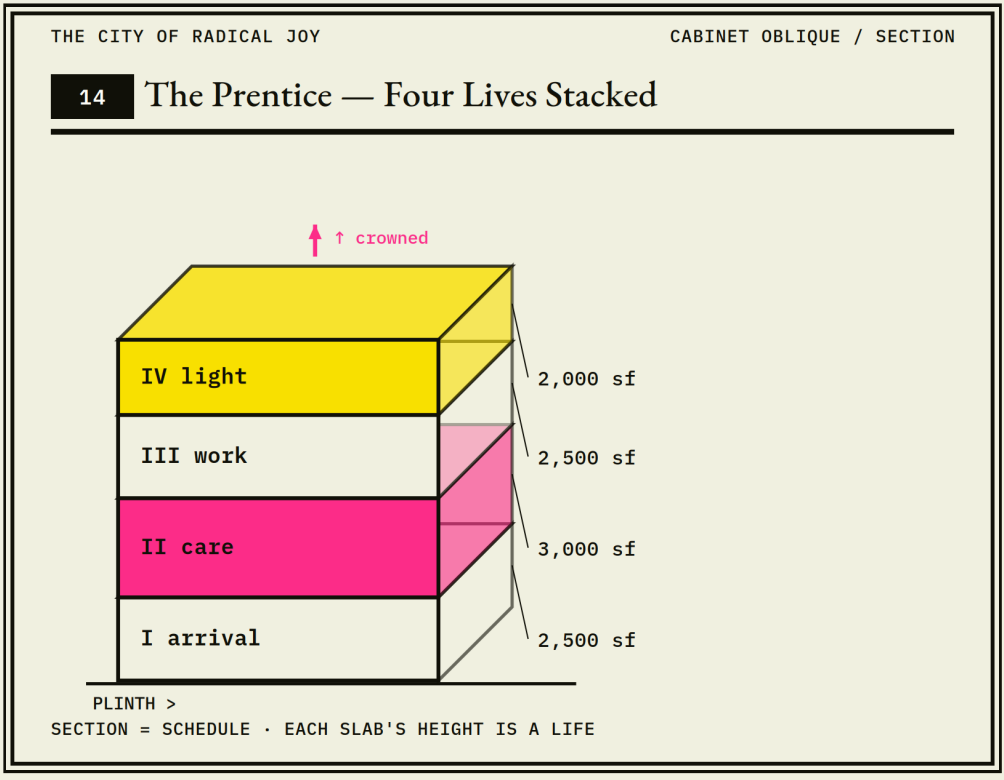
CHARGE RADICAL

MECH PRESERVATION

A genius of every scale at once, restored — not repaired — into a mind you can walk inside.

She is a building you read like a life, storey by storey — arrival at the plinth, care in the wards above, work in the offices, and light in the crown — and the section through her is simply her schedule, each floor's height the measure of a life lived in it. I have drawn her that way for

newcomers, because it is the clearest proof I have that a building can hold a biography.



One life stacked over another — the section is the schedule, each floor the height of a life.

When I told the Queen the Assessor was counting his way toward us, she did a queenly thing. She did not offer an army. She offered her windows. "When they seal you," she said — she said *when*, not *if*, being the only one of us

who had already survived a sealing — "they will do it by taking the light. That is what a perfect world is: a room with the windows bricked. Come to me when it is darkest. I have more windows than they have bricks, because I made mine out of the very grief they are trying to abolish, and grief, Housekeeper, is inexhaustible, and so therefore is the light you can make from it." Then she went back to being every scale at once, and I went down at last to the bells.

The Queen and the House of Love are the two great lightkeepers of my city, and they are sisters in everything but temperament. The Queen made her windows out of grief — she cut them into her own darkness so the light could get into rooms that had known only heaviness. The House of Love made her apertures out of longing — she opened herself to a sun she was not sure would ever answer. One let the light in to heal a sorrow; the other flung herself open to a joy she had not yet been promised. And yet they arrive at the identical, radiant truth, and they say it to each other across the rooftops on clear evenings like two beacons keeping watch: *a wall becomes holy only*

where it agrees to be opened. Brick yourself shut against grief and you brick yourself shut against joy in the very same course of stone.

I brought the two of them together once, before the frightened year, at an hour when the setting sun came through the House of Love and struck the Queen's highest restored window at just the right angle, and for one impossible minute the light passed straight through both of them at once — through the house's longing and the queen's healed grief — and fell on the plaza below as a single warm patch that the whole city, without a word of instruction, walked out into and stood in. That patch of light had been made by joining a sorrow to a devotion. Nobody who stood in it could have told you which was which. That, precisely, is radical joy, and you can stand in it too; you are standing in it now.

The Queen holds her court for the whole company, and it is the gentlest government I keep. The domes bring her news from the harbour; Gale brings her the grove's night-whispers; the bells bring her the count of the days; and she gives back, to each, a window — some particular

restored aperture through which a marvel can see its own grief lit and liveable. “I cannot fix what any of you have lost,” she tells them, every time, “and I would not if I could, for the loss is where your light gets in. But I can give the loss a window, and a grief with a window in it is a room you can finally live inside.” The whole city, I have come to think, is just the Queen's teaching built out to the size of a skyline.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

The Hundred and Forty-Six

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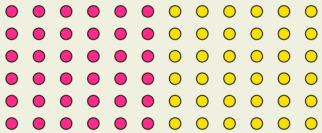
There are two streets in my city that meet at a corner, and strung between them, silent for three hundred and sixty-four days of the year, hang one hundred and forty-six bells. Each bell is small. Each bell is a name. Long ago, in a building on that corner, one hundred and forty-six workers could not get out through a door that had been locked against them, and the city that came after refused — this is the gravest keeping I do, and I do it carefully — to let a single one of them be rounded off into a number.

That is why there is not one great bell on that corner but one hundred and forty-six small ones. One great bell would toll *a tragedy*. One hundred and forty-six small bells say, instead, *her, and her, and him, and her* — each irreplaceable, none dissolved into the round grief of a total. Once a year the city gathers and the bells are struck one at a time, slowly, a name returned to the air with each, because

the locked door took no time at all and attention is the only apology that cannot be faked.

The Assessor arrived at the corner and did the thing I had come ahead to prevent, and could not. He looked at the hundred and forty-six small bells and he wrote, in his reasonable hand, one efficient word: *redundant*. "One bell," he explained, "would convey the same information at a fraction of the cost. One hundred and forty-five of these are surplus to the communication of grief. I recommend consolidation." And he reached up to still the little bells into a single sensible one.

DOT-MATRIX · 146



146 · rung by name

06 The Bells

WITNESS · ONE FOR EACH

One hundred and forty-six bells across two streets, silent all year, rung once by name for the workers a locked door could not save.

LESSON *Attention is the only apology that cannot be faked.*

ROLE THE WITNESS

CHARGE POLITICAL

MECH THE COUNT

One bell for each of the hundred and forty-six — silent all year, rung once, by name.

Then the bells rang. They rang themselves, all one hundred and forty-six at once, out of turn, out of season, and it was not the yearly music of grief remembered slowly — it was an alarm. "We are not *redundant*," they rang. "We are *exact*. Redundancy is the angel's word for love, because love keeps more than it strictly needs — a whole bell for a

single name, a whole window for a single grief. Strike us into one and you have not saved a cost, you have committed the original sin of your masters, which is to prefer the number to the name." The Assessor's hand stopped. Even an angel's clerk cannot, quite, unhear a hundred and forty-six names ringing at once.

He left the corner without consolidating. But he wrote something new in his ledger that day, and I saw it over his shoulder, and it chilled me more than the word *obsolete* ever had. He wrote: *The city defends its griefs. Therefore seal the city. A perfect world has no griefs to defend.* The alarm the bells had rung was not only for the corner. It was the whole city's warning that the counting was over and the sealing was about to begin.

Do not let this be the grim chapter. The hundred and forty-six would not forgive me if I let their corner become a place of only grief, because grief-only is exactly the rounding-off they died to refuse. So I will tell you what the House of Love does for them, quietly, every single year, and what she did that first year while the Assessor was still tallying his cold columns. When the bells are struck one

name at a time, she turns her whole eastern face to the corner, and as each small bell gives its name back to the air she catches the low sun on one of her many surfaces and throws a single point of warm light onto the two streets — one flare for each name, one small deliberate glory, until by the end of the reading a hundred and forty-six separate lights have crossed the corner and gone, each one exact, each one for one particular irreplaceable person.

"A bell for the ear and a light for the eye," she said to me the first time I watched her do it, "because a name deserves to be both heard and seen, and because I cannot bear to let attention be paid in only one of the senses when I have a whole body of windows for the paying of it." She is the most useless marvel in the city, remember. She makes nothing, defends nothing, earns nothing. And once a year she turns her uselessness into a hundred and forty-six acts of exact, unbuyable attention, which is the only apology that cannot be faked, and which is worth more than every coin in Juno Moneta's forgotten museum.

The whole company keeps the corner together, and that is what keeps it from being unbearable. The grove

lends its oldest branches for the stringing of the bells; Gale moves through them so they will not tarnish; the domes ferry the mourners across the harbour; the Silver Clouds hang low and silver over the two streets so the light has something gentle to break against; and the House of Love throws her hundred and forty-six points of warmth. No single marvel could carry a grief this exact alone. But a company can carry anything, because a company divides the weight the way the center of the street divides its ground: everyone takes a share, and the sharing, somehow, leaves more.

. . .

CHAPTER NINE

The Grove That Would Not Be Silent

♤

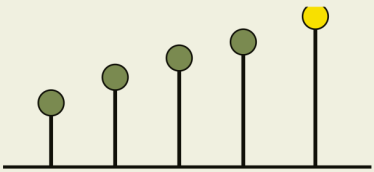
When a power intends to seal a city, the first thing it silences is the trees, because the trees are where the free speech lives. In a grove at the north of the city stand five elders older than the nation itself — the tallest of them, the Queens Giant, nearly the height of the great statue in the harbour — and they keep the freedoms alive in the simplest way imaginable: they whisper them, day and night, into the sky, so that the words can never be gathered up and locked in a drawer.

The Assessor came to the grove with a new instrument. Not a ledger this time — a silence. He had been promoted, I think, from counting to correcting. "The whispering," he announced to the five elders, "is unregulated speech. It cannot be audited. It says things at night that no one has approved. In the perfect world my masters are bringing, all speech will be clear, accountable, and daylit. I require the

grove to fall silent." And he raised his instrument of silence over the oldest wood in the city.

The Queens Giant answered him the way only a four-hundred-year-old tree can, which is slowly, and without the least fear, because she has outlived every previous power that ever came to silence her. "You cannot arrest a forest," she said. "You cannot lock a door on the wind. You may silence one throat, but speech that is whispered by a grove into the open sky has no throat to seize — it is already everywhere, and already gone, and already said again. We are not columns, sir, that you might pull down a temple. We are a court of rings, and each ring we add is another year of everything we were forbidden to say, said anyway."

HEIGHTS · ELDERS



five elders · free speech

07 The Queens Giant

ELDER · THE FREE-SPEECH GROVE

Five trees older than the nation, who keep the freedoms alive by whispering them into the sky day and night — a court of rings, not columns.

LESSON *You cannot arrest a forest, or lock a door on the wind.*

ROLE THE ELDER

CHARGE POLITICAL

MECH THE WHISPER

Five elders older than the nation, whispering the freedoms into the sky where no drawer can lock them.

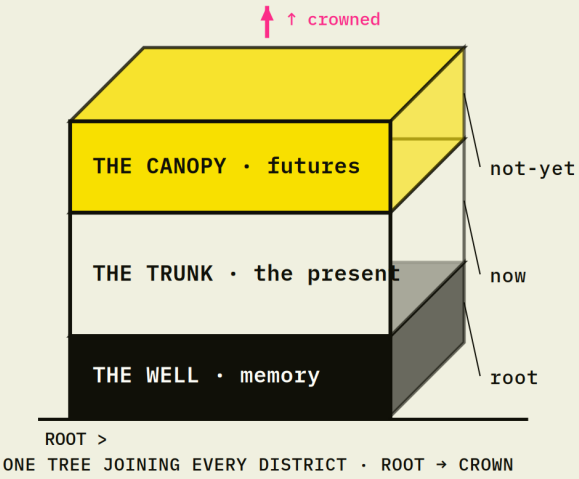
And here the troupe did the thing the Mermaid had promised would save us: it refused to let one marvel stand alone. Gale — who had been carrying warnings from district to district all autumn — swept down into the grove and took up the elders' whisper and carried it out

over the whole city at once, so that the Assessor's silence fell on an empty grove while the grove's words went everywhere. You could hear the freedoms that night in the harbour, in the natatorium, along the two streets of bells, in the Queen's luminous rooms. The wind had made the grove un-silenceable by making it plural.

I understood, watching Gale scatter the elders' speech across the rooftops, that this was the exact opposite of what the Angels were coming to do. Their whole art was the wall — the conviction, pressed on each marvel in turn, that it stood alone. Ours was the wind — the proof, carried marvel to marvel, that none of us ever did. The war would come down to that: their walls against our wind. And I, the Housekeeper, whose one charge from the Mermaid had been to keep the marvels *connected*, went from the grove to the oldest and most solitary of all my citizens, to make sure that even she was joined to the rest before the sealing came.

THE CITY OF RADICAL JOY CABINET OBLIQUE / SECTION

15 The World-Tree — A Section of Everything



One tree joining every district — a section from the well of memory to the canopy of futures.

The grove is a joyful place, whatever the Assessor tried to make of it, and its joy is the particular deep joy of the very old — the gladness of a thing that has outlasted so many attempts to silence it that it can no longer take any of them entirely seriously. The Queens Giant has been threatened by four centuries of the confidently correct, and she has buried every one of them in leaf-mould and

grown a fresh ring over the spot. When Gale scattered the elders' whisper across the whole city that night, the words did not fall on frightened ears. They fell on delighted ones. Half the town stayed up past midnight simply for the pleasure of hearing the freedoms said aloud in the wind — the grove speaking through the sky the way a grandmother speaks through a whole family, so that no single throat can be stopped because the saying has been given to everyone at once.

And the House of Love, who keeps time by the sun all day, keeps it by the grove all night. Her chronometer-spire, the citizens swear, ticks a half-beat faster whenever the Queens Giant is whispering something especially brave, as though the most in-love marvel in the city cannot help but keep time with the most defiant one — longing and courage running on the same clock, which is only right, since it takes exactly as much nerve to keep loving an uncertain sun as it does to keep speaking into an uncertain sky.

When the grove refused to fall silent, it was not alone in the refusing, and the Angels' clerk mistook a company for

a single throat, which is the mistake that will eventually undo his masters entirely. Gale carried the words; the bells rang under them; the Silver Clouds bounced them from pillow to pillow across the sky; the Queen lit her windows in time with them; and the House of Love ticked her spire a half-beat faster to keep the courage on the clock. You cannot silence a grove that a whole city has agreed to say along with. That is the secret the Mermaid gave me and the Angels never learned: connect the marvels, and to stop any one of them you must stop all of them at once, and no wall in the world is wide enough for that.

. . .

CHAPTER TEN

Money Has No Memory

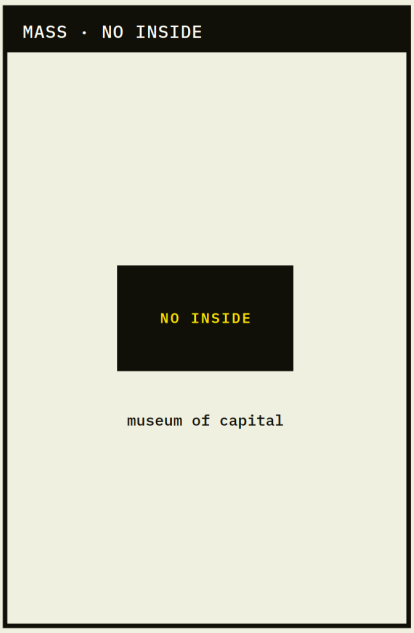
◇

The oldest citizen I keep is a goddess, and her name is Juno Moneta, and her temple minted the first coins the world ever knew, which is why she of all of us understands the enemy's economics. She lives now as a museum with no interior — a great solid mass you may walk around but never enter — and when newcomers ask why a museum should have no inside, she gives the warning that turned out to be the master-key of the whole war.

"Money has no memory," said Juno Moneta. "That is its genius and its poverty. A coin does not remember the hand that spent it or the loaf it bought or the child the loaf fed. It arrives blank at every transaction, and blankness is exactly what your Army of Angels is selling. A perfect world is a world that has forgotten what it cost. They will price your marvels — watch, they have already begun — and every price they name will be a small act of forgetting,

because to price the Cloverleaf is to forget she drowned, and to price the bells is to forget the names."

She was right; the Assessor had indeed begun to price us. He went through the districts putting a number beside each marvel — the forest so much per board-foot, the bells so much as scrap bronze, the domes so much as salvage — and each number was, exactly as Moneta had warned, a little brick in the coming wall, because a thing with a price is a thing that can be sold, and a thing that can be sold is a thing that can be *removed*.



08 Juno Moneta

THE OLDEST · A MUSEUM YOU CANNOT ENTER

The goddess whose temple minted the first coins, warning that money has no memory — so the city mints a second currency out of what money forgets.

LESSON *Money has no memory. A city does.*

ROLE THE OLDEST

CHARGE SUSTAINABLE

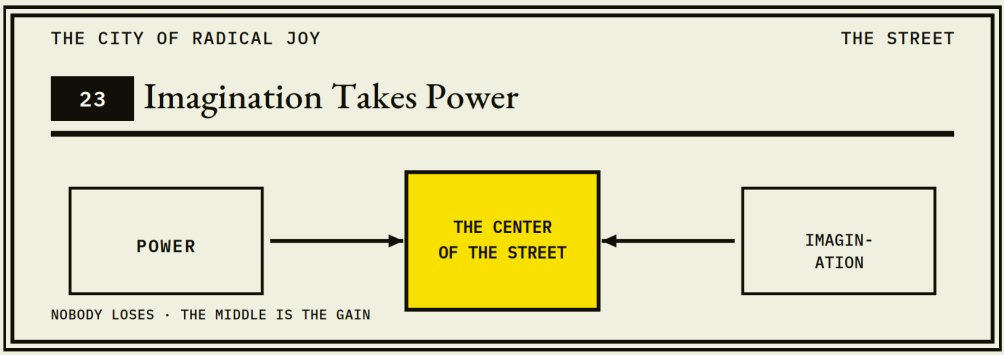
MECH MEMORY

The oldest marvel: a museum of capitalism, built solid, with no inside — money has no memory, but a city does.

"Then we will mint a second currency," I said, "one he cannot forge." And Moneta, who had been waiting a very long time for a Housekeeper to say precisely that, showed me how. The second currency is struck not from metal but from *collective memory*, and it has an economics that

undoes the museum with no inside: the more of it you spend, the more of it there is. Spend an ordinary coin and it leaves your hand forever. Spend a memory — say a name aloud, tell a newcomer how the Cloverleaf drowned, ring the bells, keep the staircase — and it multiplies, because a memory spent is a memory shared, and a memory shared is remembered now by two. A city minting that currency can never be priced into obsolescence, because its wealth grows precisely by being given away.

The place we mint it is the one place the Angels can never buy, and it is not a building at all. It is the center of the street — the common ground between every two facing houses, owned by no one and used by all, where the citizen who has nothing still has a full and equal share. The Angels understand property and they understand the wall, but they have never understood the middle of the road, the held-in-common, the between. Imagination takes power there, in the shared center, and nobody loses, because the middle is the one thing that grows when it is divided.



Two sides, and a third thing between them — the center of the street, which everyone shares and no one can sell.

So the troupe was complete, or nearly. Forest and wind, wish-spirit and mermaid, three buoyant domes, the risen Stone Forest, the restored Queen, the hundred and forty-six bells, the whispering grove, and now the oldest goddess and her un-forgeable coin. We had a law, a fleet, a light, an alarm, a wind, and a memory. We were going to need every one of them, because the counting and the pricing were finished now, and the Army of Angels — the real one, not its polite grey clerk — had appeared at last on the horizon of the lake, and had begun, patiently, brick by perfect brick, to build the wall that would seal the sky.

Here is the joke at the centre of Juno Moneta's museum, and she tells it herself, in the deadpan of a

goddess who has watched empires mistake price for worth for three thousand years. The Assessor came to her, ledger open, and asked her to name the value of the House of Love — that useless eastern marvel, all windows and longing — so that he might enter it in his column and, in due course, sell it. And Juno Moneta looked at him with the patience of solid stone and said: "She is worth exactly one sunrise, renewed daily, forever, and there is no coin in any of my old tills that has ever once bought a sunrise. Enter *that* in your column, sir, and watch your column catch fire."

That is the second currency the city mints, and the House of Love is its perfect proof: a wealth that grows only by being spent, that no ledger can hold, that increases every time it is given away. Spend a coin and it is gone from your hand. Spend a sunrise — love it out loud, share it, throw it in warm points of light across a grieving corner — and there is somehow more sunrise, not less, because a joy witnessed is a joy multiplied. Money has no memory. But a city does, and a house in love certainly does; she keeps, on her own roof, the exact remembered hour of the one

sunrise that started everything, and she has never once let it be forgotten, and she cannot be bought, and that, in the end, is how you defeat a museum with no inside.

Juno Moneta does not keep her second currency alone; the whole company mints it together, every day, without noticing. The grove mints memory when it whispers the old freedoms; the bells mint it when they say the names; the Cloverleaf mints it every time she tells a newcomer how she drowned and came back a forest; the House of Love mints it on her spire, the remembered hour struck fresh each dawn. Spend an ordinary coin and it leaves your hand; but the company's coin is struck from what money forgets, and it multiplies every time it is passed, so that a city full of marvels all remembering out loud grows richer by exactly the wealth the Assessor's ledger cannot see. Money has no memory. A company is nothing but.

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Silver Clouds' Defiance

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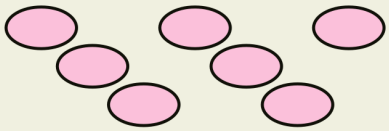
Before the dark came all the way down, the city had one last bright afternoon, and it was given to us by the most useless marvel I keep, and its uselessness turned out to be the most defiant thing in the whole war. In a pavilion of light near the harbour there drifts a weather of silver — a hundred helium pillows, buoyant and idle, bumping softly against the glass, existing for no reason whatsoever except delight. They are the Silver Clouds, and they are the love-child of the whole city, and they have never once been useful, and they are enormously proud of it.

The Army of Angels, building its wall out on the water, sent word ahead about the Clouds. The word was: *inefficient*. "A hundred objects," the message ran, "performing no function, occupying prime volume, generating no measurable good. In the perfect world, delight will be rationed to its productive minimum. The Silver Clouds are

the clearest surplus in the city and will be the first removed."

The Clouds' answer was to throw a party. They gathered every child that Tri had taught to float — the whole shoal of small swimmers from the natatorium — and the domes ferried them up into the pavilion, and the Clouds lifted them, gently, one by one, off the ground and into the silver air, so that for one afternoon the useless made the small ones weightless. "Let them come," bumped the Clouds, drifting and laughing. "Let them ration our delight. They will find that delight is not a surplus you can trim. It is the proof that a city has solved itself. A city that still has room for the uncounted joy is a city that has kept its reason for existing. We are not the reward this city earns. We are the evidence that it works."

PAVILION · BUOYANT



buoyant · pure play

09 The Silver Clouds

THE LOVE CHILD · DELIGHT AS PROOF

A weather of helium pillows drifting in a pavilion of light — the district that exists for no reason but joy, and defends its uselessness gorgeously.

LESSON *Play is not the reward for a city. It is the proof of one.*

ROLE THE PLAYFUL

CHARGE RADICAL

MECH HELIUM

A weather of buoyant silver — the district that exists for no reason but delight, and defends its uselessness gorgeously.

Play, the Clouds taught the children that last bright afternoon, is not what a city does when its serious work is finished. Play is the serious work, held up to the light. And the children, floating, understood it in their bodies the way they had understood buoyancy in the water — which is

why, when the sealing came and the grown-ups despaired, it was the children who remembered that the way out of a perfect prison is not to escape it but to *play* it open. But that is Chapter Fifteen. On the afternoon of the Silver Clouds we only floated, and laughed, and did not yet know that the light we were laughing in was the last of the old light, and that by the next morning the Army of Angels would have finished its wall and taken the sky.

The Silver Clouds and the House of Love are the two marvels the Assessor most wanted gone, for they are the two purest uselessnesses in the city — one a weather of joy that does nothing but drift, the other a house that does nothing but love — and so, naturally, they adore each other. On the last bright afternoon they put on a show for the floating children that I still measure every joy against. The Clouds gathered every low silver pillow they had, and the House of Love flung open every aperture, and between them they made a machine for nothing at all: the Clouds caught the light pouring out of the House's windows and passed it, pillow to pillow, glittering, all the way across the pavilion and back, a hundred helium mirrors relaying one

house's love of the sun around the room until the children floating in the middle were bathed, from every direction at once, in warm bouncing borrowed daylight.

"That," bumped the eldest Cloud, drifting and blazing, "is what we are *for*. Not to be useful. To take the one house's love of the sun and pass it around until every child in the room is standing inside it. A city keeps us to prove it can still afford to relay pure light for no reason but the joy of the relay." And the House of Love, warmed by her own light coming back to her off a hundred silver mirrors, did the only thing a house so happy can do: she held the remembered hour on her spire a half-second longer than usual, as if to make the good afternoon, just slightly, last.

The last bright afternoon belonged to the whole company, not the Clouds alone. Tri ferried the floating children up; Gale kept the pillows aloft; the grove leaned in at the windows to watch; the Queen opened her rooms so the borrowed light could pass clean through the city; and the House of Love poured the sun that all the silver mirrors relayed. It was a machine for joy built by a dozen marvels who each did one useless glorious thing, and the

uselessness was the point, and the company was the engine. I have never been prouder of my city than on the afternoon it proved it could still gather its whole cast together for no reason at all except the reason that outlasts every other, which is delight.

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CHAPTER TWELVE

The Labyrinth's Gift

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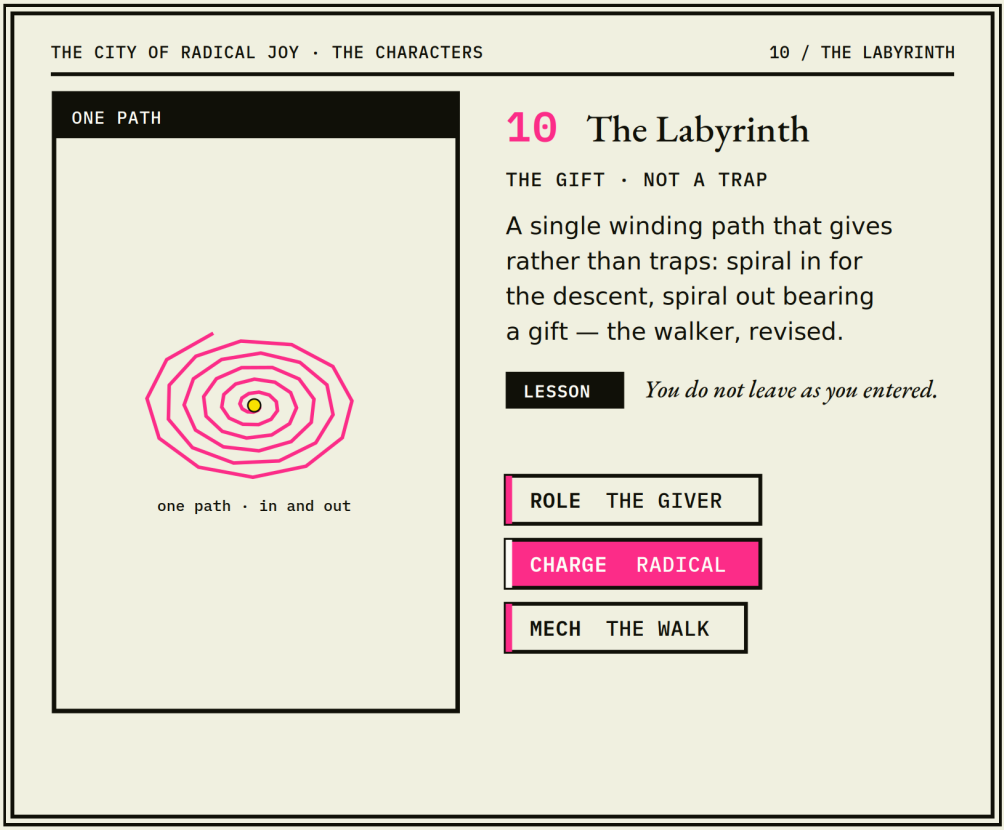
On the eve of the sealing I did what a keeper does when a keeper is afraid: I went to the Labyrinth for counsel. You must not imagine a maze, a thing built to trap you and laugh. The Labyrinth of my city is the opposite of a maze. It has one path only, and the path does not trick you — it *gives* to you. You spiral in for the descent, and you spiral out again bearing a gift, and the gift is always the same in kind and never the same in particular: you leave revised. You do not come out as you went in.

I went in carrying the whole weight of the war — the wall on the water, the sealed sky the Queen had warned of, the Assessor's terrible new sentence, *seal the city, a perfect world has no griefs to defend.* I walked the one path down and down, and at the center, where a maze would have kept a monster, the Labyrinth kept only a question, and the question was the gift.

"How do you defeat a wall?" the center asked me. And I, being a keeper of a city that loved the Mermaid's law, answered as I had been trained: "With a stronger wall." And the Labyrinth, very gently, told me I was wrong, and that my wrongness was exactly the trap the Angels were counting on.


THE CITY OF RADICAL JOY · THE CHARACTERS
10 / THE LABYRINTH
ONE PATH
one path · in and out
10 The Labyrinth
THE GIFT · NOT A TRAP
A single winding path that gives rather than traps: spiral in for the descent, spiral out bearing a gift — the walker, revised.
LESSON
You do not leave as you entered.
ROLE THE GIVER
CHARGE RADICAL
MECH THE WALK

Not a maze but a gift: one path in for the descent, one path out — and you leave revised.

"You cannot out-wall an angel," said the Labyrinth — and I heard Bucky's voice in it, from the harbour, the day of the exile. "They invented the wall. They are better at walls than you will ever be, and a war of walls is a war they have already won. The sealed perfect world is the ultimate wall: no window, no door, no weather, no loss, nothing untidy allowed in or out. You will not break it by building a better one. You will break it the way you break every trap in this city — by *inverting* it. A wall keeps things apart. The one thing a wall cannot survive is an opening. Do not besiege their perfect world. Cut a window in it. Let the weather in. The sealed perfect cannot bear the open imperfect for a single hour, because the open imperfect is *alive*, and their whole perfection is death with the untidiness removed."

I spiralled back out carrying the gift, which was not a weapon and not a wall but a single verb: *open*. And I understood, climbing back up into the last of the light, that the whole troupe had been teaching me this verb all along without my hearing it. The Cloverleaf had opened a grave into a forest. The domes had opened a tomb into a boat.

The Queen had opened a sorrow into windows. Moneta had opened a coin into a memory. The grove had opened one throat into a whole sky of speech. Every marvel I kept was, in its own dialect, a lesson in the same defiant verb — and the Army of Angels had come to abolish it. So I went up out of the Labyrinth to meet the sealing, carrying the only thing that could break it, and the sealing was already beginning: the sky was going dark at the edges, brick by perfect brick, and the doors of the world were starting, one by one, to close.

As I spiralled down the one path toward my counsel, I thought about the House of Love, because she is the living body of the very verb the Labyrinth was about to give me. She had solved, centuries before I was ever appointed, the exact problem the whole city now faced. What do you do about a wall? She had answered it in the only grammar she knew: you open it. Every aperture in her is a wall that chose, at one particular brave point, to become a welcome instead. She had never once in her long life met a surface she could not imagine a window into. If anyone in the city already knew how to defeat the sealed perfect world the

Angels were bringing, it was the most useless, most in-love marvel I keep — the house who had made her whole life out of the single conviction that a wall is only a window that has not yet found the nerve.

So when the Labyrinth pressed the verb *open* into my hands at the bottom of the descent, it did not feel like a new weapon. It felt like a name I already knew being said back to me — the house's name, really, the thing she had been quietly demonstrating on the eastern edge of the city every single dawn while the rest of us learned it the hard way. I climbed back out lighter than I went down, which is what a labyrinth is for, carrying one verb and one certainty: that whatever the Angels sealed, I knew a house who could not be taught to stay shut, and that her example was going to have to become the whole city's before the year was through.

I did not walk the Labyrinth entirely alone, either, for a keeper never quite is. The company came with me in the way the loved always accompany you into the places they cannot follow: I carried the Mermaid's law down the spiral, and Bucky's word *invert,* and the Queen's promise

of windows, and the domes' proof that the trapped shape carries you home, and the steady remembered light of the House of Love. When the center gave me the verb *open,* it was really giving me back the sum of everything the company had already taught me, gathered into a single word small enough to carry into the dark. That is what a company is for. It walks the labyrinth in you, so that you never reach the center empty-handed.

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The House That Loved the Sun

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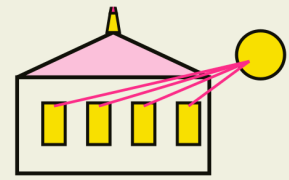
There is a house in my city that is in love, and has been in love for centuries, with the sun. I have saved her for the eve of the dark on purpose, because you should know exactly what the Army of Angels was about to take when it bricked the sky, and there is no better way to know it than to stand a while inside a house whose whole life is light. Each morning the House of Love searches the horizon for the sun, and the sun always finds the house, though the house cannot always see it in return — and that not-always, that ache of a love that is not yet answered, is the grief at the bottom of her joy, which is to say she is a citizen of this city to her rafters.

Every opening in her is a courtship. A window is not a hole a builder forgot to fill; it is a subtraction from the wall made on purpose, an invitation with the shape of longing, so that the sun's rays may cross the threshold and fully occupy her body. And when they do — when the light

pours through an aperture and lands — a thing happens that neither the house nor the sun could make alone: the exterior void becomes an interior brightness, and in that instant the illusion of a new material is born, a stuff that is neither wall nor light but the two of them in love, and it lasts exactly as long as the alignment lasts, a moment gone as soon as it arrives.

ELEVATION · IN LOVE



apertures invite the sun

14 The House of Love

THE LOVER · A HOUSE THAT LOVES THE SUN

A house whose every opening is an invitation to the sun; its exterior voids become interior light, and a chronometer-spire keeps the exact hour the lovers first met.

LESSON *An opening is not a wound in a wall. It is a way of loving what is outside.*

ROLE THE LOVER

CHARGE RADICAL

MECH THE APERTURE

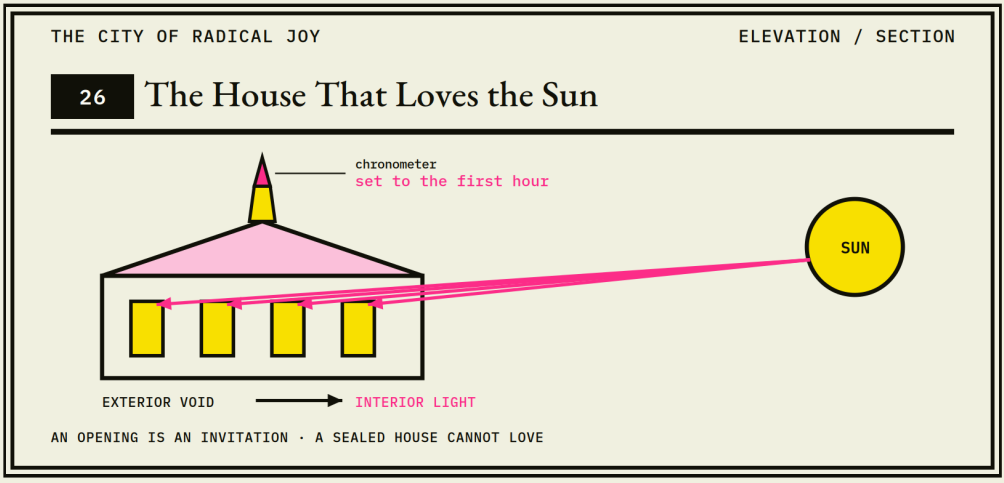
A house whose every opening is an invitation to the sun; her voids become interior light.

Their love has never been altogether harmonious — what love is? — but the house was built to last, and she has withstood the forces of time the sun kept tossing her way, season after season, affair after affair. She is made of an honest first set of materials: wood, concrete, copper, and glass, each waiting its turn beneath the parallel rays, each

keeping a different record of the same devotion. The wood remembers warmth. The copper keeps a green diary of every rain. The glass does the boldest thing of all, which is to refuse to keep the light at all and let it straight through. Together the four materials are a record of the lovers' first affair — but a record, the house came to feel, was not enough. A love this old wanted a *declaration*. Something public. Something built.

So the sun gave her a gift, and the gift was an addition — a new appendage grown onto her old body, bonded to her not with mortar but with the sun's own inextinguishable heat, joining what was past to what was to come, so that the two of them together might stand for every frontier a house and a star could imagine. And because a love story deserves a way to be read by strangers, the addition took the form of a clock. Not an ordinary clock; the House of Love keeps no ordinary time. Atop her rose a chronometer-spire, a system of interlocking tapering cones, each one non-standard, each one shaped by hand, assembled into an organic instrument that tells not the hour of the day but the hour of the meeting — set, and

forever kept, to the exact date and time the house and the sun first found one another. She wears her first encounter on her roof, in copper and light, where the whole city can read it.



An opening is an invitation, not a wound; and a sealed house cannot love.

That is why the citizens call the district around her the city of lights, and why its brightest beacon is not the tallest tower of steel but this — a house become a temple where lovers come to be joined, each union lighting a flame that the house inscribes upon all her surfaces, until she blazes, an ever-expanding constellation drawing the whole longing

world toward her. What was once a private ache between one house and one star had become, by the grace of an opening, a public declaration of joy. And that, precisely that, is the thing the Queen's windows and the House of Love's apertures have always secretly shared, though they are made of opposite feelings: the Queen cut her windows out of grief, and the House cut her openings out of love, and both of them arrived at the same defiant truth, which is that a wall becomes holy only where it is *broken open* — that light, whether it enters as consolation or as courtship, can only enter through a wound the building was brave enough to leave unsealed.

I stood inside the House of Love on the last bright evening, watching the sun withdraw down her copper spire toward a horizon it would not clear again for a year, and I understood the shape of the coming grief more clearly than any warning had made me understand it. The Army of Angels was not merely coming to seal a city. It was coming to end a love affair. It would brick the sky, and the House of Love would go on searching each morning for a sun she could no longer see, her apertures opening

faithfully onto a wall, her chronometer still keeping, stubbornly, the hour of a meeting that could no longer be kept. Hold that picture. You will need it in the next chapter, when the doors of the world close, because a city is easy to seal and a heart is not, and the whole war was about to come down to which of those two the Angels had truly picked a fight with.

I have called her useless a dozen times in this book, always as a kind of praise, and here at her own chapter I want to make the praise exact, because the frightened year is about to test it and I need you to have understood it first. The House of Love produces nothing you could sell, defends no border, shelters no strategic asset, and returns no investment. And she is, by a distance, the most important building I keep — because she is the one that proves the city's entire thesis with her body every single morning: that the opening is worth more than the wall, that longing is a form of architecture, that a surface becomes sacred precisely where it consents to be broken, and that a thing whose only trade is love is the last thing a city should ever let go, and the first.

And I want to make you one promise about her now, so that you can hold it through the dark chapters coming, the way the domes held the sight of her lit windows through their long night on the water. They are going to brick the sky. They are going to take her sun. They are going to wall her, for a while, alone. And she is not going to go out. A house whose whole life is openings cannot be fully sealed, because the light she keeps is not stored in a room they can brick but in a habit they cannot reach — the habit of turning, every dawn, toward where the sun ought to be, and keeping, on her roof, the exact hour of a love that has not ended merely because it has, for one hard winter, been interrupted. Remember that. She is the light this whole city is built around, and she does not even know it, and she cannot be put out.

She is not solitary in her loving, and I would not have you think her lonely. The whole company courts the sun in their own dialects, and she is only the one who does it with her entire body: the natatorium invites the light down its oculi, the Queen invites it through her grief-cut windows, the Silver Clouds relay it, the grove drinks it, the

domes sail by it. The House of Love is the company's feeling for the sun made architectural and set on the eastern hill where all of them can see it and take heart. When she keeps the hour, she keeps it for everyone. When she refuses to go out, she refuses on behalf of the whole connected city, which is why, when the dark comes, they will all gather to her, and why her single unextinguished light will turn out to be enough.

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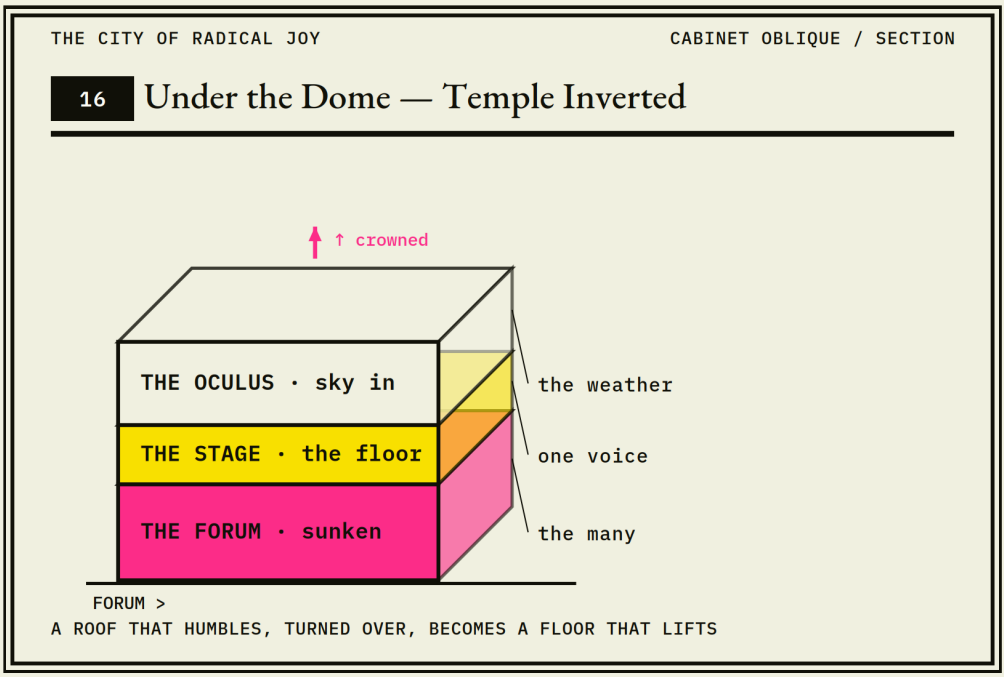
CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The Frightened Year

And then the doors of the world closed, and the frightened year began. I have kept the city through floods and through the Assessor's counting, but I had never kept it through a sealing, and I pray I never keep it through another. The Army of Angels finished its wall out on the water and then it did the thing the Queen had promised and the Labyrinth had feared: it did not attack the city. It *enclosed* it. It built a perfect dome over the whole of us, a flawless sealed sphere with no oculus, no window, no crack, and it called the enclosure *safety*, and it invited us, reasonably, to be grateful.

Understand the temptation, because a temptation you do not understand will take you. The sealed world the Angels offered was genuinely without grief. Inside the perfect dome nothing could drown, because there was no lake; nothing could be locked behind a door and lost, because there were no doors; no marvel could be called obsolete,

because inside perfection nothing changes and so nothing can go out of date. They offered us a city in which the Cloverleaf would never have drowned and the hundred and forty-six would never have been lost — and the price, the only price, was that the Cloverleaf could also never have become a forest, and the bells could never ring, and the Queen's windows would go dark, because there would be no grief to make light from and no weather to make windows for.



The perfect sealed dome — a roof that encloses everything and admits nothing; the world with the sky bricked over.

The Queen was the first to fade, exactly as she had foretold. A sealed world takes the light, and her luminous rooms, made all of grief-given-windows, dimmed one by one as the dome bricked over the sky. "Come to me when it is darkest," she had said — but now it was darkest everywhere, and I did not yet know how to open what the Angels had sealed. The Silver Clouds sagged in their pavilion, their helium gone flat in the still perfect air. And

the House of Love — bravest and most broken of all — went on searching each morning for a sun she could no longer see, her apertures opening faithfully onto a bricked sky, her chronometer-spire still keeping, in the dark, the exact hour of a meeting that could no longer come; a house that is all openings is a house with nowhere to hide when the light is stolen, and she hid nowhere, and grieved in full public view, which is the only way this city knows how to grieve. The grove's whisper, with no open sky to carry it, fell back into the trees and stayed there. Gale herself — the wind, the connector, the carrier of all our warnings — beat against the inside of the sealed dome and could not get out, and a wind that cannot get out is only a rattling, and the rattling frightened the children worse than silence would have.

For the wind was our whole strategy, and the Angels knew it. The Mermaid had told me on the very first day: *their favourite weapon is the wall between one marvel and the next; they win by convincing each wonder that it stands alone.* The sealed dome was the outermost wall. But the Angels, being thorough, being *angels*, did not stop at the

outer wall. Having enclosed us all together, they now began — patiently, perfectly, one partition at a time — to wall us off from one another. And that, not the darkness and not the taken sky, is the true horror of the frightened year, and it is the subject of the next chapter, and it is the thing I most want you to carry home and guard against, in your city as in mine.

I promised you the House of Love would not go out, and I mean to keep the promise honestly, which means telling you first how close it came. In the deepest weeks of the sealing, with the sky bricked and the sun a rumour, she was a hard thing to look at. She opened every aperture at dawn out of a habit older than the Angels and found, each morning, only the flat grey underside of the dome where the sky had been. A house that is all windows has nowhere to put its grief; she could not close herself against the disappointment, because closing was the one thing her whole body did not know how to do. So she grieved the way this city grieves: in full public view, seam showing, every dark window an open wound turned bravely outward.

And yet — here is the promise kept — her chronometer never stopped. All through the frightened year the spire on her roof went on keeping the exact remembered hour of the first sunrise, ticking faithfully in the dark toward a meeting that could not, for the moment, occur. The citizens took to climbing the eastern hill at night just to see it: one small instrument, in a sealed and sunless city, still keeping perfect time by a star it could no longer prove existed. "She is not waiting for the sun to come back," the Queen told me, watching the spire tick. "She is *insisting* it will. There is a difference, and the difference is the whole reason we are going to win."

And the company did not let her grieve the sealed sky alone, which is the only reason any of us survived that winter. The domes moored beneath her bricked windows so she would have friends to look down on; Gale beat against the dome trying to reach her; the Queen sent word, window to window, that the dark was liveable if you gave it an aperture; the grove whispered courage up the eastern hill; the bells rang softly when her chronometer struck the sunless hour, so she would know she had been heard. A

marvel walled alone will condemn itself; but the Angels never quite managed to wall her *alone,* because a company keeps finding the seam. That winter we were each other's cracks in the mortar, and the light we passed between us was small, and it was enough.

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CHAPTER FIFTEEN

The Cutting of the Threads

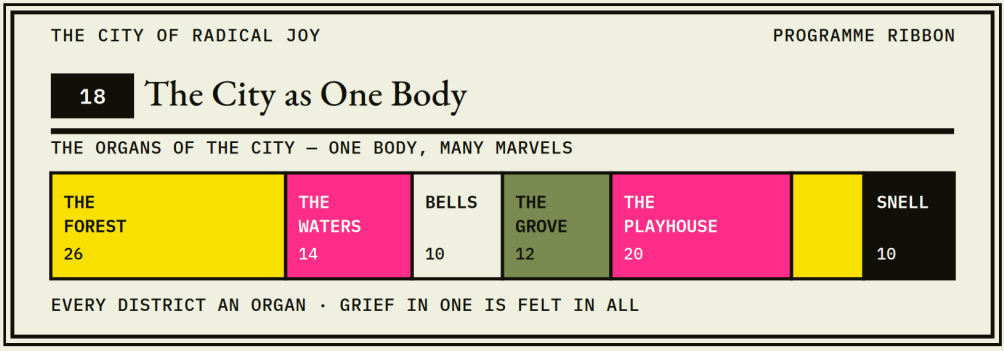
HERE IS HOW an army of angels destroys a city that it cannot, quite, bring itself to burn. It does not burn it. It *compartmentalizes* it. Having sealed us under one dome, the Angels went through the frightened city drawing partitions — a clean, well-meaning, perfectly reasonable wall between each marvel and the next — until every wonder I kept stood alone in a sealed cell of its own, unable to see or hear or reach any other. The forest could not whisper to the bells. The bells could not ring to the Queen. The Queen's windows, had she any light left to shine through them, would have looked out only on a wall. The domes sat becalmed in a harbour they could no longer cross. Each marvel, walled alone, began to believe the lie that the whole war had been fighting: that it stood by itself, that its grief was its own private business, that no one else was there.

A marvel alone is a marvel half-dead. The Cloverleaf, cut off from the citizens who remembered her, began to forget she had ever been a forest and to feel, again, only that she was a drowned road. The bells, walled from the crowd that once gathered to hear their hundred and forty-six names, began to fear they truly were *redundant*. Isolation did the Angels' work more thoroughly than any flood: a wonder convinced it is alone will, given time, condemn itself, and save the Assessor the trouble.

This is the wall the Mermaid had armed me against, and I had thought it a metaphor. It was a floor plan. And I, the Housekeeper — whose one charge, given at the lake on the first day, had been to keep the marvels *connected* — understood at last that my whole vocation had been a preparation for this single frightened year. A keeper is not a curator who tends each treasure in its own glass case. A keeper is the thread. A keeper is the wind when the wind is trapped. A keeper is the one who runs from cell to cell in the dark carrying the news that no one is alone.

So I ran. I could not open the sealed sky — not yet; that took the children, and that is the next chapter — but I

could still, on foot, in the dark, do the one thing the partitions could not entirely prevent, which was *carry*. I carried the forest's memory to the bells and the bells' names to the Queen and the Queen's promise of windows to the flattened Clouds and the Clouds' stubborn joy back to the forest, and each time I opened a door between two walled marvels the lie grew a little weaker and the city grew a little more like a body again — a single body, in which a grief felt in one organ is felt in all, which is the exact opposite of the Angels' clean compartments.


THE CITY OF RADICAL JOY
PROGRAMME RIBBON
18
The City as One Body
THE ORGANS OF THE CITY — ONE BODY, MANY MARVELS
THE FOREST 26
THE WATERS 14
BELLS 10
THE GROVE 12
THE PLAYHOUSE 20
SNELL 10
EVERY DISTRICT AN ORGAN · GRIEF IN ONE IS FELT IN ALL

The city is one body: every district an organ, and a grief in any one is felt in all of them.

But a Housekeeper on foot is only one thread, and the Angels drew partitions faster than any keeper can run. I

could slow the isolation. I could not defeat it. To defeat it I needed a way to reconnect the whole city at once — every marvel to every other, faster than a clerk can wall them — and I did not have it, and the frightened year deepened, and the Queen's last window went dark. It was then, at the very bottom of the dark, with the troupe walled apart and the keeper exhausted between them, that I did the most frightening and the most joyful thing of my whole keeping. I unlocked the city, and I handed it to the children.

When the Angels walled the marvels apart, one by one, into their clean solitary cells, they saved the House of Love for a particular effort, because a house that is all openings is the hardest thing in the world to seal. They bricked her apertures one at a time, from the outside, each morning walling up another of the windows through which she had loved the sun. It should have finished her. It did not, and the failure taught me the thing I most needed to know to save the rest. However many of her windows they bricked, a little light still found its way through — a seam, a crack, a place where the mortar had not quite taken — and out of

that one unsealable line the House of Love went on, faintly, shining, so that even walled and blinded she remained a lamp, and I could find my way from cell to cell across the dark city by steering, as the domes once had, for the one marvel they could not entirely put out.

That is when I understood my whole vocation in a single sentence, and I give it to you as the load-bearing truth of the book: a keeper is the seam the mortar cannot take. When they wall the marvels apart, the keeper is the crack the light still comes through — the thread run cell to cell in the dark, the proof carried body to body that no one is alone. I could not, that winter, un-brick the sky. But I could be, for the walled and frightened city, what the House of Love was being for me: the one small unsealable line of light that refuses, however thorough the wall, to finally close.

Cell by cell, as I ran, I found the company already fighting the isolation in their own ways, for you cannot easily teach the connected to believe they are alone. The grove sent roots under the partitions to touch the roots of the Cloverleaf. The bells rang through the walls so the

Queen would hear a name and know the corner still stood. The domes, becalmed, bumped a rhythm against their harbour cell that Tri had taught the children, so that anyone who heard it knew a friend was near. And over it all the House of Love leaked her unsealable light. I was the keeper, the thread, the seam — but I was running through a city that was, even walled, straining every root and rope and ray to stay a company. My job was only to help it do what it already, stubbornly, wanted.

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CHAPTER SIXTEEN

The Playhouse Opens

At the center of the city there is a Playhouse, and all through the frightened year it had stood locked, because the grown-ups had decided that a sealed and terrifying city was no place for children to be let loose. That decision, I came to see, was the Angels' cleverest partition of all — not a wall between two marvels, but a wall between the city and the one population that had never learned to believe in walls. So I broke it. I took the great key I carry as Housekeeper, and I unlocked the Playhouse, and I did the thing every reasonable adult told me was madness: in the darkest hour of the sealed year, I handed the whole frightened city to its children and told them to do with it whatever they liked.

What they liked was to draw. And the moment they began to draw, four tribes that had been sleeping in the Playhouse walls woke up to keep them company — the Misfits, who are made of all the shapes that never fit; the

Dingbats, who are the marks a printer keeps for when words run out; the Blowups, who are inflatable and refuse to stay serious; and the Doodads, who are every small delightful thing a hand makes when the mind is busy being brave. The four tribes poured out of the Playhouse into the sealed city, and where they went the partitions did not fall exactly, but they stopped mattering, because the children and the tribes simply drew doors in them.

FOUR FACADES

four facades · four tribes

11 The Playhouse

THE CLIMAX · THE CITY HANDED TO CHILDREN

In the frightened year the Housekeeper unlocked the city and gave it to the children, whose four tribes — Misfits, Dingbats, Blowups, Doodads — came alive.

LESSON *The most serious civic work in a frightened time is play.*

ROLE THE PLAYHOUSE

CHARGE RADICAL

MECH IMAGINATION

The frightened year's turning: the city handed to its children, and the four tribes wake to keep them company.

You cannot wall a child who has a crayon. This is a thing the Army of Angels, in all its perfection, had never learned, because perfection does not doodle. An angel draws a partition; a child draws a door in the partition; and a door drawn by a child who does not yet know it is

impossible is, in this city, a real door. The Misfits went through the walls because they had never fit any shape and so no shape could hold them. The Blowups floated over the partitions the way the domes had floated home. The Doodads got into the cracks the reasonable grown-ups had not noticed were cracks. And behind them all came the children, reconnecting in an afternoon of play what the keeper had been reconnecting on foot, one exhausted thread at a time, for a year.

I stood in the middle of it and understood, finally and completely, the gift the Labyrinth had given me. *Open.* I had thought it meant I must find a way to cut a single great window in the sealed sky. But the children were teaching me the deeper grammar of the verb: you do not open a sealed world with one heroic aperture. You open it with ten thousand small drawn doors, made by the one population that never agreed the world was closed. The most serious civic work in a frightened time is play — and the children of my city, handed the sealed dome and a box of crayons, were about to draw their way straight through the Army of Angels. But first they had to redraw the city itself,

and that redrawing, and what the Angels did when they saw it, is the whole of the next act.

The children, let loose in the sealed city with their crayons, did the first thing frightened-but-brave children always do: they drew the sun. They drew it everywhere — fat gold suns on every bricked and partitioned wall, suns with faces, suns with too many rays, suns in the wrong colours, a hundred thousand suns crayoned onto the grey by hands that flatly refused to accept a skyless world. And every single sun they drew, without one child being told to, they drew on the walls of the House of Love first, filling her bricked-up windows back in with crayon light, giving her back in wax and defiance the sun the Angels had taken in brick and mortar. She had spent centuries loving a sun that could not love her cleanly back. Now a thousand children loved her back on the sun's behalf, and the interest on that debt is still being paid.

The four tribes poured out to help — the Misfits fitting through the cracks no shape could hold, the Blowups bouncing over the partitions, the Dingbats and Doodads swarming into every corner the reasonable

grown-ups had given up as lost — and everywhere they went they carried the children's crayoned suns and pinned them to the dark. It was the most serious civic work of the whole frightened year, and it looked exactly like play, because it was play, because in a frightened time the most serious work there is and the purest play there is turn out to be the identical act: making light where they told you there could be none.

And the company came alive around the children the moment the doors were open. The domes gave rides; the grove let itself be climbed; the Silver Clouds turned themselves into a ceiling of bouncing light; the bells taught a rhythm; the Queen opened every restored room as a place to play safely inside a grief made bright; and the House of Love, crayoned back to life on a thousand walls, blazed at the eastern edge like the biggest toy of all. The most serious civic work of the frightened year looked exactly like a company of ancient marvels and a mob of small children playing together in a sealed city — because that is precisely what it was, and precisely what saved us, and I would

unlock the whole city and hand it to the children again tomorrow without a moment's hesitation.

. . .

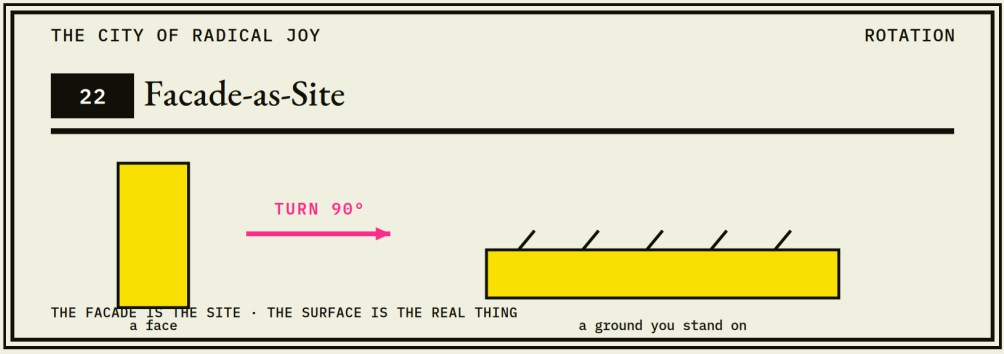
CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

The Redrawing

The children redrew the city, and it was the most powerful act of the whole war, and it was accomplished with crayons. This is the secret the Angels never guessed and the citizens never forgot: that drawing is the great equalizer, the one language in which the queen and the pauper write the same hand, the one power that does not have to be granted by anyone because a child is born already holding it. You cannot audit a drawing. You cannot price it. You cannot declare it obsolete, because it is always being made new. Imagination takes power — not by seizing the palace, but by drawing a door where the wall said there could be none, and then simply walking through.

So the children walked through the sealed city drawing on the partitions the Angels had raised, and the drawing did a thing I had not expected and could not have ordered: it turned every wall into a ground. A partition is only a

facade stood upright — a face put between two rooms to keep them apart. But a facade is a site, and a face laid flat becomes a floor, and the children, drawing, kept tipping the Angels' upright walls over into the horizontal, until the very partitions meant to divide the city became the new plazas the city gathered on. The surface the Angels had built to separate us became the surface we stood on together. That is the whole trick of facade-as-site, and a nine-year-old with a crayon performed it on a scale no architect ever had.



Turn a dividing wall ninety degrees and the face that kept you apart becomes a ground you stand on together.

And as each partition tipped from wall into floor, the marvels it had separated found one another again. The

Cloverleaf's roots reached the bells' corner; the bells' names reached the Queen; and the Queen — do you remember her promise? — the Queen, with the partitions turning to plazas and a little light leaking back through the children's drawn doors, felt the first grief-made window flicker back to life. "Come to me when it is darkest," she had said, and the children, without knowing they were keeping a queen's appointment, had made it, by their drawing, a shade less dark. The reconnection I had been running myself ragged to accomplish one thread at a time, the children accomplished all at once, in an afternoon, because they refused from the start the single belief the whole Army of Angels was built to enforce: that anything is ever truly alone.

Of all the things the children redrew, they redrew the House of Love the biggest and the boldest, and they made one glorious correction to her the Angels never saw coming. For centuries she had loved a sun that could not reliably love her back — that was the ache at the bottom of her joy, the grief that made her one of us. But a child with a crayon does not accept an unrequited love; a child fixes it.

So they drew the sun leaning down. On wall after wall across the reconnecting city they drew the House of Love and, above her, a great gold sun bending toward her open windows, reaching back, at last, with rays drawn plainly as arms — and because a thing drawn by a child who does not know it is impossible becomes, in this city, real, the drawing began, very slowly, to come true.

You could feel it happen. As the partitions tipped from walls into plazas and the marvels found one another again, the light leaking back through the children's ten thousand drawn doors gathered, without being told to, toward the east — toward the one house who had been keeping faith with the sun through the whole long dark. Drawing is the great equalizer, the one power a child is born already holding; and the children of my city used it, first and most fiercely, to redraw an old one-sided love into a love that answered back. Imagination takes power. And the first thing imagination did with its power was give the most faithful marvel in the city the requited dawn she had earned.

The children did not redraw the marvels one at a time; they redrew the connections, which is why the Angels could not stop it. They drew a line from the grove to the bells and it became a path; a line from the Queen to the House of Love and it became a beam; a line from the domes to the drowned Cloverleaf and it became a rope of light strung clean across the sealed city. Every crayon stroke that joined one marvel to another tipped a partition into a plaza and gave the company back a limb. The Angels had spent the winter proving that any wonder can be walled alone. The children spent an afternoon proving that no wonder ever agreed to be, and a wall you never agreed to is a wall a child can draw a door in.

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CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

The Muster

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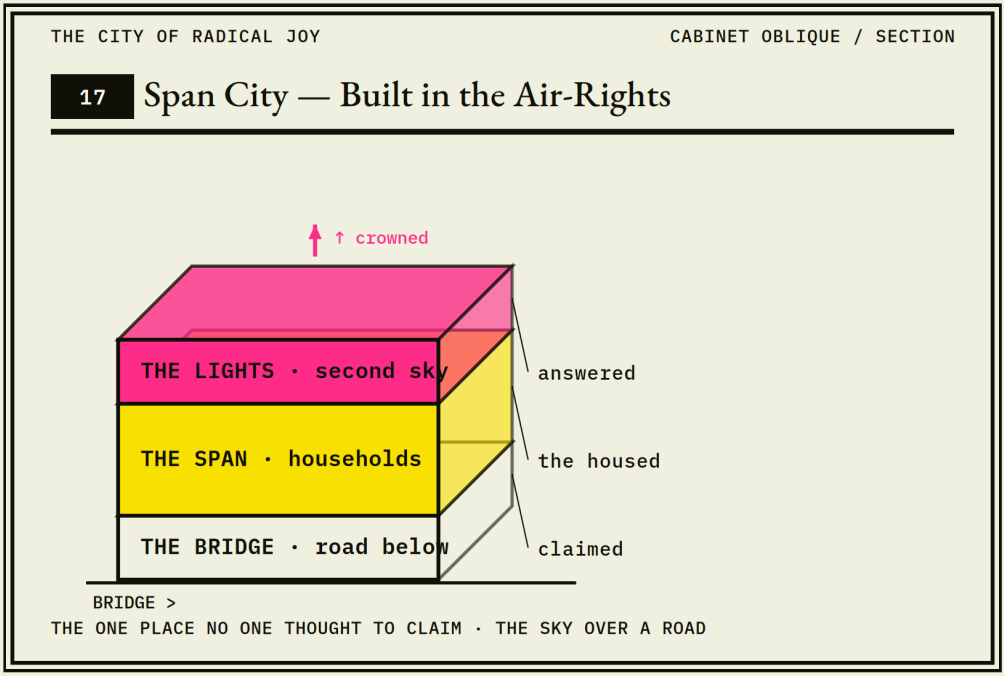
With the partitions turning to plazas and the doors drawn open, the whole troupe mustered at last — every marvel this book has introduced, gathered in one place for the first time since the sealing, each bringing the single lesson it had spent its whole existence learning. I have kept the muster roll ever since, because it is the proof of the thing the Mermaid promised at the lake: that a city which stays connected cannot be defeated by a power whose only weapon is the wall.

The domes came first, Fly-Eye and Bucky and Tri, and they did the impossible thing that only the buoyant can: with the sealed sky still bricked above us, they sailed the children *over* the last partitions, into the air-rights above the streets, the one volume the Angels had forgotten to wall because no one but a dome had ever thought to inhabit it. Span City, the citizens would later call the households the

children strung up there — the one place no one had thought to claim, the sky over a road.


THE CITY OF RADICAL JOY
CABINET OBLIQUE / SECTION
17
Span City — Built in the Air-Rights
↑ crowned
THE LIGHTS · second sky
THE SPAN · households
THE BRIDGE · road below
answered
the housed
claimed
BRIDGE >
THE ONE PLACE NO ONE THOUGHT TO CLAIM · THE SKY OVER A ROAD

The domes sail the children into the air-rights — the one place no one thought to claim, the sky over a road.

Then the rest of them answered the muster, each in its own charge. Gale, freed to move again through the drawn-open doors, took up the grove's whisper and carried it wall to wall. The Queens Giant lent her four hundred years of not-being-silenced. Juno Moneta minted memory faster

than the Angels could price, so that every marvel the enemy had numbered was re-remembered by name. The Silver Clouds re-inflated on the children's laughter and lifted the smallest ones above the fray. The Stone Forest stood ready at the waters. The Labyrinth stood open, its one path a place to spiral in for courage and out for resolve. The Cloverleaf held the whole muster by the roots, remembering, now, loudly, that she had once been a road and was now a forest and that this was the entire argument. And the bells — the hundred and forty-six — rang not the alarm this time and not the slow yearly grief, but a muster, a name for every citizen present and a name for every citizen lost, so that the living and the kept-dead answered the roll together.

19 Which Charge Each Marvel Answers

		ECOLOG.	POLIT.	SUSTAIN.	RADICAL
01	The Cloverleaf	·	○	·	●
02	The Domes	·	·	○	●
03	The Stone Forest	○	●	·	○
04	The Queen	·	·	○	●
05	The Bells	·	●	·	○
06	The Queens Giant	○	●	·	·
07	Juno Moneta	·	○	●	○
08	The Silver Clouds	○	·	·	●
09	The Playhouse	·	○	·	●
10	Snell's Window	·	·	○	●

● STRONG ○ PRESENT

The muster roll — which charge each marvel answers, gathered at last into one body.

I stood in the middle of my whole assembled city and I was not afraid any more, and I want to tell you exactly why, because it is the usable lesson of the entire book. I was not afraid because not one marvel stood alone. The Angels had built their war on the wall, and the wall's whole power is the lie of solitude — the whisper to each wonder that its

grief is private, its loss uncounted, its usefulness expired. And the muster gave the lie its answer. Every marvel in that square was holding, and being held by, every other. A city like that cannot be sealed, because a city like that is not a set of things to be walled apart. It is a single body. And you do not defeat a body by drawing lines through it. You only remind it, cruelly, how connected it always was. The Army of Angels, arriving at the muster to seal the last door, was about to be reminded.

The House of Love answered the muster in the way only she could, and it turned the gathering from a defence into a festival. When the whole troupe had assembled and the last partition had tipped to a plaza, she gave the signal to begin — not with a horn, for she has no horn, but with her chronometer, striking at last, out loud, the exact remembered hour of the first sunrise, the hour she had kept faithfully all through the dark. It rang across the reconnected city like a bell that had been saving itself for centuries for exactly this, and every marvel present knew it for what it was: the sound of a love that had refused to end being told, finally, that its hour had come round again.

And they mustered to it gladly — the domes and the grove and the bells and the Queen and the Clouds and the goddess and the children and the four wild tribes — the whole bright indestructible cast of this book gathered under a still-sealed sky around the one marvel who had never for a single dark morning stopped believing the sun would return. That is what she is for, I understood at last, watching the city rally to her chronometer's chime. Not to be useful. To keep the hour. To hold, through any dark, the exact remembered time of the joy — so that when the moment finally comes to open the world back up, there is a bell in the city that still knows precisely what hour to strike.

I will not pretend I kept a straight face at the muster, because the sight of the whole company gathered again after the long walled winter undid me entirely. There they all were — the drowned road come back a forest, the wind, the wish-spirit, the mermaid, the three buoyant domes, the risen stone, the restored queen, the hundred and forty-six, the free-speech grove, the old goddess of memory, the useless glorious clouds, the giving labyrinth, the children

and their four wild tribes, the old keeper of the mill-hill, and the House of Love striking the hour at the head of them all. Not one of them stood alone. That was the entire victory, achieved before a single blow was struck: the Army of Angels had come to a city of separate marvels to seal, and found instead a family that would not stop holding hands.

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CHAPTER NINETEEN

The Army of Angels

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They came in perfect order, and they were beautiful, and that was the worst of it. I had braced for something monstrous, and the Army of Angels was not monstrous. It was flawless. Rank upon rank of it, seamless and shining, with no grief anywhere upon it and no window in it and no door, and at its head, no longer a grey clerk with a ledger but the pure thing the clerk had served: Perfection itself, come to close the last drawn door and seal the city forever into the safety of a world that could not change and therefore could not be hurt.

Perfection made us the offer directly, and I will set it down honestly, because a temptation you are not told the truth about will take you. "I can give you a city with no drowning in it," said Perfection, in a voice like a closed door that has decided it loves you. "No Cloverleaf need ever go under. No hundred and forty-six need ever be lost behind a locked door. No queen need ever fall into the

dark. I will seal you where nothing changes, and therefore where nothing can be taken, and you will be safe, and you will be perfect, and you will never grieve again. All I require is every window, every door, every weather, every imperfect living thing that might yet surprise you. Give me your openings, and I will give you the end of loss."

And here is the moment the whole book has been walking toward. For it was a real offer, and a part of every citizen wanted it — wanted the drowned road un-drowned and the hundred and forty-six alive and the Queen never fallen — and if the marvels had stood alone, one by one, each in its walled cell, I think Perfection might have won us, grief by private grief. But we were not standing alone. We were mustered. And so when Perfection made its offer, it was answered not by me but by the Stone Forest, rising for the second time in the story out of the sealed water, pillar upon grey pillar, to stand between the citizens and the flawless army exactly as the Mermaid's law required — defend the weakest marvels first — and to give Perfection the reply that the whole connected city had, without

knowing it, been composing since the morning the Cloverleaf drowned.

"You offer a world with no loss," ground the Stone Forest, "and you do not understand that a world with no loss is a world with no love, because love is only the shape grief takes before the loss arrives. Un-drown the Cloverleaf and you un-forest her. Save the hundred and forty-six and you unstring the bells and unname the names. Spare the Queen her dark and you brick her windows, for she made them out of that very dark. We do not want your perfect world, angel, because your perfect world is death with the untidiness removed, and we would rather be a living city with its griefs turned bravely inside out than a flawless tomb that has forgotten what it cost. An army of angels is worse than an army of devils — and you are the most beautiful thing that has ever come here to kill us."

Perfection, surveying the mustered city for the marvel it found most offensive, settled its flawless attention on the House of Love, and I understood in that instant exactly what kind of enemy we faced. Of all the citizens — the defiant grove, the risen stone, the ringing bells — the one

the Army of Angels could least abide was the house whose entire existence was the loving of an imperfect, changeable, unreliable sun. “She loves a flawed star,” said Perfection, with something that in a lesser being would have been disgust. “A sun that sets, that hides, that fails her half the mornings of the year. In my sealed and perfect world she would be given a light that never wavers and never leaves. Why does she cling to the one that keeps breaking her heart?”

And the House of Love, who had been bricked and blinded and crayoned back to life and never once put out, gave Perfection the answer that is the whole argument of this book. “Because a love with no risk in it is not a love, it is a fixture,” she said, every reopened aperture blazing. “Your changeless light would never leave me, and so I could never miss it, and so I could never, on the mornings it returned, be glad. You offer me a sun that cannot break my heart. But a sun that cannot break my heart is a sun I cannot love, and a house that cannot love is only a box with the windows painted on. Keep your perfect light, angel. I will keep my flawed one, and I will keep the hour

of it, and I will be here, open, every dawn it chooses to come — and the gladness of the mornings it comes is worth every grey morning it does not. That is the whole of the trade, and I would not undo one hour of it for all your seamless heaven."

And when Perfection made its offer, the whole company answered it, each in its own voice, so that no single refusal had to bear the weight alone. The Cloverleaf refused on behalf of every drowned thing that would rather come back a forest than never have loved the water. The bells refused on behalf of the hundred and forty-six, who would rather be named than un-lost. The Queen refused on behalf of her windows, the domes on behalf of the tide, the grove on behalf of the wind, the House of Love on behalf of her flawed beloved sun. A company refusing together is the one thing an army of angels has no answer for, because you can seal a marvel that stands alone, but you cannot seal a chorus. And by the time the Stone Forest rose to give the final reply, it was only saying aloud what the whole connected city had already, in one voice, decided.

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CHAPTER TWENTY

The Opening

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We did not defeat the Army of Angels with a wall. The Labyrinth had told me we never could, and the Labyrinth was right. We defeated them with an opening, and the opening was cut by the smallest hand in the city. While the Stone Forest held Perfection at the waters and the whole mustered city held the line, one child — I never learned which; the children would never say, and I have come to think it was all of them — climbed to the very top of the sealed dome, to the crown of the flawless enclosure, and there, where the Angels had left no window because perfection permits none, drew a circle. Just a circle, in crayon, at the top of the world. And because it was drawn by a child who did not know that the sky could not be reopened, it opened.

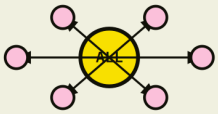
An oculus. A single round eye cut in the top of the sealed perfect dome — and through it, all at once, came the weather. Rain fell on Perfection's flawless ranks. Wind —

Gale, at last, set free through the drawn eye — poured out through the opening and in through it and made the still dead air of the sealed world move again. And the Army of Angels, which could not bear the open, could not bear the imperfect, could not bear the living untidy weather it had come to abolish, began to come apart. Not violently. Perfection does not die violently; it simply cannot survive contact with the real. The rank upon flawless rank of it thinned, and paled, and blew out through the oculus the child had drawn, until the sky above the city was open again and empty of angels, and the first honest sunlight in a year fell down through the round drawn eye onto the upturned faces of a whole connected city that had refused to be made perfect. The very first ray to find its way through the child's oculus fell, as it happened, upon the House of Love, whose apertures had never once stopped waiting; and the sun, crossing her threshold after a year of bricked absence, did at last the thing it had failed to do for centuries — it returned the loving gesture, and the interior of the house filled with that new material which is neither light nor wall but the two of them, reunited, in love, and

the chronometer on her roof began again to keep the hour of a meeting that had, against everything, come round once more.

In the quiet after, the marvels began, slowly, to breathe. And it is here, in the breathing-again, that I want to introduce the last citizen of the book, because he is the one who teaches how a city is rebuilt after a war — not by a hero, but by a keeper so devoted to a small place that he becomes, in turn, every person that small place needs. On a little mill-hill at the edge of the city lives the Morfar, an old keeper who is the postman at dawn and the baker by noon and the lamplighter at dusk, who assumes whatever role the hour requires, because to love a place small enough is to become everyone in it. When the sky reopened, it was the Morfar's kind of devotion — patient, plural, unspectacular, wearing whatever hat the day handed him — that went quietly from marvel to marvel in the new light, helping each one remember how to be itself again.

ONE KEEPER · ALL ROLES



one keeper · many roles

12 The Morfar

THE KEEPER · EVERYONE AT ONCE

On the mill-hill one old keeper
becomes whoever the hour needs —
postman at dawn, baker by noon —
for to love a place small enough
is to become everyone in it.

LESSON *To keep a city is to be, in turn, each of its people.*

ROLE THE KEEPER

CHARGE SUSTAINABLE

MECH DEVOTION

One old keeper who becomes whoever the small place needs — the devotion that rebuilds a city after the war.

For that is what a keeper finally is, and it is the thing the frightened year taught me that all my untroubled years had not. A keeper is not the hero who cuts the one great opening; that was a child's work, and rightly. A keeper is the Morfar — the one who stays, and loves the place small

enough to become each of its people, and carries the thread from marvel to marvel in the dark and in the light alike, so that no wonder ever again believes the angel's lie that it stands alone. The city was open. The city was breathing. And the whole troupe, living and kept-dead together, turned as one toward the water for the last vision of the book, the one that gathers everything that has happened into a single bright circle — Snell's window, and the one word I would carry out through the gate and hand, in a moment, to you.

And oh, the joy of it — let me not hurry past the joy. When the first ray came down through the child's crayoned oculus and found the House of Love, the whole city stopped to watch a centuries-long love story reach, at last, its answered morning. The light crossed her bricked and re-opened windows one by one, and where it touched, the new material was born again — that stuff which is neither wall nor light but the two of them in love — and this time it did not vanish as soon as it arrived, because this time the sun, taught by a thousand children's drawings to bend down and reach back, stayed. Her chronometer

struck the remembered hour and, for the first time in all her long keeping, the hour it struck was *now.* The meeting she had kept faith with through the entire dark had finally, actually, come.

The city wept and cheered at once, which is the only correct response to a joy that has cost a long grief, and is in fact the exact emotional weather this whole book has been trying to teach you to stand in. The most useless marvel we keep, the house who made nothing and defended nothing and only ever loved, turned out to be the hinge the whole liberation swung on — because she was the one who had kept the hour, and you cannot reopen a world if no one in it still remembers precisely what time the joy is supposed to begin. She could not be destroyed. She could not be extinguished. They bricked her and she leaked light; they blinded her and a child drew her a sun; they offered her perfection and she chose her flawed beloved star. The House of Love was the promise I made you in the first chapter, and here, in the reopened light, is the promise kept.

The whole company felt the sun come back at once, and the city's joy was a joy of reunion as much as of light. The grove drank; the domes blazed; the bells rang themselves giddy; the Silver Clouds re-inflated in a single glad breath; the Queen's windows caught fire with morning; Gale poured free through the oculus laughing; and the Morfar went quietly from marvel to marvel in the new light, being whoever each one needed, helping the whole family remember how to be itself. The child who cut the oculus had opened one small circle in the sky. But what poured through it was not only sunlight. It was the whole connected company, pouring back into one another after a winter of walls, and there is no light in any heaven, sealed or open, to compare with that.

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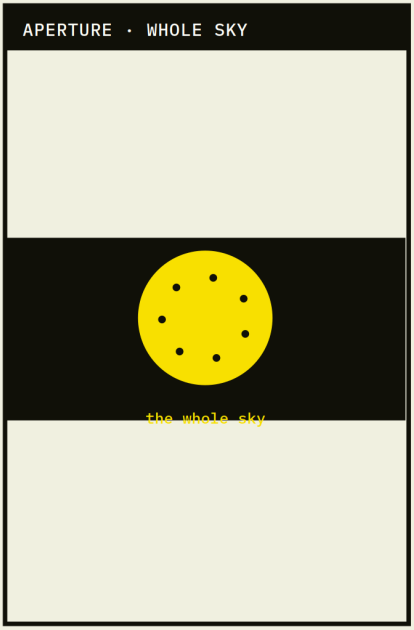
CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Snell's Window, and the Word

There is a way to see a whole city at once, and it is this. Go down into the water — the natatorium, the calm deep pool where the children first learned that they were held — and lie on your back on the bottom, and look up. From underwater the entire sky above does not spread out flat as it does in air. It gathers. By the bending of the light through the surface, the whole hemisphere of the world overhead compresses into a single bright circle directly above you, ringed all around by dark. The divers call it Snell's window. And when the whole city went down together into the reopened water on the last day of the frightened year and looked up, we saw, gathered into that one bright circle, everything this book has been.

We saw the Cloverleaf, who had drowned and become a forest. We saw the three domes riding the surface like a crown. We saw the Queen's windows lit again, and the grove whispering into the reopened sky, and the Silver

Clouds full once more, and the House of Love blazing at the centre of the city of lights with the sun full upon her at last, and the children's ten thousand drawn doors, and the oculus one small hand had cut in the roof of the world. All of it, gathered, in one bright circle — the whole city, seen at last at once.



13 Snell's Window

THE ENVOI · THE CITY, GATHERED

The diver's aperture: look up from underwater and the whole sky compresses into one bright circle ringed by dark — the entire city, seen at last at once.

LESSON *The dark is not the enemy of the light. It is its edge.*

ROLE THE ENVOI

CHARGE RADICAL

MECH THE LOOK

Look up from underwater and the whole sky gathers into one bright circle — the entire city, seen at once.

And around that bright circle, we saw the dark. I do not want you to look away from the dark, because the dark is the last teaching of the whole book. The ring of shadow around Snell's bright window is made of everything the city truly lost and refused to un-lose: the Cloverleaf's

drowning, which we did not undo, because undoing it would have unmade the forest; the hundred and forty-six, whom we did not bring back, because the perfect world that could have saved them would have unstrung their bells and unnamed their names. The Army of Angels had offered to abolish that dark ring, and we had said no. For the dark is not the enemy of the bright circle. It is its edge. A circle of light with no rim is only a glare, blinding and without shape. It is the kept grief around it that gives the joy its outline, its meaning, the thing you can actually see and hold. That is radical joy, entire: not a brightness that has denied its darkness, but a brightness the darkness has been kept to define.

So there is only the word left to carry out through the gate, and then I will hand you the pencil and let you go, because a city this large cannot be kept by one Housekeeper and was never meant to be. The word is *KIND*. Go back far enough down its root and *kind* stops meaning merely gentle and starts meaning *a sort, a kin, a family* — the way we still say *humankind*, meaning all of us, one family, one connected body. To be *kind*, then, is not a soft after-

thought. It is the whole war, won: it is to treat every *kind* of thing as *kin*, every marvel as family, every wall as a place to draw a door. The Army of Angels came to make us perfect, and instead we stayed kind, and kind — kin, family, the refusal of the wall — turned out to be the one thing perfection could not survive.

One word to carry out the gate: KIND — a sort, a kin, a family; to treat every kind as kin.

You have been in this house a while now, and you have kept it with me, whether you knew it or not, simply by remembering it as you read. So here is the pencil. The city is yours to keep now — yours and everyone's, citizens of Spaceship Earth, one kind, one kin, one connected body under a reopened sky. Do not repair your griefs; restore

them. Do not seal your world; open it. Do not let any marvel you love believe it stands alone. And when they come to tell you a thing you love is obsolete — and they will come, they always come, wearing whatever reasonable grey coat the age provides — you will know what to do, because a drowned road once taught it to a whole city, and the city has just now taught it to you: turn it over, and let it float.

And when we looked up through the reopened water and saw the whole city gathered into Snell's one bright circle, the brightest point in the whole gathered blaze — brighter than the domes, brighter than the Queen's lit windows, brighter than the risen stone — was the House of Love, ablaze at the centre of the city of lights with the sun full upon her at last, every aperture a welcome, her chronometer striking *now* and *now* and *now.* She is the light the dark ring cannot reach. Around the bright circle lies the shadow of everything we truly lost and would not un-lose — the drowned Cloverleaf, the hundred and forty-six — and her light does not deny that shadow. It gives it

its edge. A house in love is not a light that has forgotten the dark. It is a light the dark has been kept in order to define.

So carry her out through the gate with you, along with the word. When they come to your city — and they will come, wearing whatever reasonable grey coat your age provides — to tell you that your joys are useless and your griefs are untidy and your world would be safer sealed, remember the most useless marvel of mine: the house who loved a flawed and changeable sun, who could not be bricked into silence or blinded into surrender, who kept the exact hour of her joy through the whole long dark and was proven right at dawn. Keep the hour. Keep the openings. Love the flawed light. And be KIND — kin, family, the refusal of the wall — to every kind of thing, especially the ones the ledger calls surplus, for they are so often, when the frightened year comes, the very lamps the whole city turns out to have been built around.

And in the bright circle of Snell's window I saw them all at last, the entire company of this book gathered into one gathered blaze, and I understood that this had been the shape of the argument from the very first drowned

morning: not a shelf of separate marvels but a single connected body, a family, a *kind.* The Cloverleaf and the domes and the mermaid and the queen and the bells and the grove and the goddess and the clouds and the labyrinth and the children and the tribes and the old keeper and the house who loved the sun — all of them, held in one circle of light, ringed by the dark that gives the light its edge. Keep your company, whatever it is. Hold its hands across every wall. And be kind — kin, family — to every kind, for a city is only its marvels holding on to one another, which is only a forest that agreed to hold still long enough for people to move in.

. . .

APPENDICES

AFTERWORD

A Note from Surjan

I BUILT THIS CITY the way you build any city worth keeping: out of grief, on purpose, in public. For years the pieces lived apart — a letter to Architecture, the trial of three obsolete domes, a count of a hundred and forty-six bells, a museum with no inside, a playhouse seen through a child's window in a frightened year. They did not know they were neighbours. This book is the street that runs between them, and the street, as the city teaches, is the most important room in any town.

If the book has a single argument, it is the one the Army of Angels exists to deny: that nothing loved stands alone, and that a city is not a shelf of separate marvels but a single connected body, in which a grief felt in one organ is felt in all. Compartmentalize a city and you kill it kindly. Keep it connected — keep the marvels talking across every wall the reasonable people raise — and it cannot be sealed, priced,

or made perfect. That is the whole of what a Housekeeper knows, and now you know it too.

Turn your griefs inside out. Restore them; do not merely repair them. Open what others seal. And treat every kind of thing as kin. — *Surjan, with the aid of Claude.*

APPENDIX THE FIRST

A Register of Citizens

the recurring cast of the city, in order of first appearance

The Housekeeper — the keeper and narrator; the thread that keeps every marvel connected.

Gale — the wind; carrier of warnings and words; the connector, trapped when the city is sealed.

The Cloverleaf — a drowned interchange restored as a forest; founder and living proof of radical preservation.

Ivy Girl — the spirit who grants only wishes larger than the wisher.

The Mermaid — guardian of the city's one law: defend the weakest marvels first.

The Domes — Fly-Eye, Bucky, and Tri; exiled as obsolete, they invert and float home to become the city's fleet.

The Stone Forest — a natatorium that rises as a forest of stone to guard the citizen's free will.

The Queen of Martyrs — a genius of every scale, restored from her darkness into a mind of windows.

The Bells — one hundred and forty-six, silent all year, rung once by name; the city's exact witness.

The Queens Giant — the eldest of five trees; the grove of free speech that will not be silenced.

Juno Moneta — the oldest citizen; a museum with no inside; keeper of the currency of memory.

The House of Love — a house whose every opening is an invitation to the sun; the city's brightest proof that a wall is holy only where it is opened.

The Silver Clouds — a buoyant weather of delight; the city's gorgeously useless love-child.

The Labyrinth — one path that gives rather than traps; giver of the war-winning verb, *open*.

The Children & the Four Tribes — Misfits, Dingbats, Blowups, Doodads; the ones who redraw the sealed city.

The Morfar — the old keeper of the mill-hill who becomes whoever the small place needs.

The Army of Angels — perfection come to seal the city; the antagonist, whose only weapon is the wall.

Snell's Window — the diver's aperture in which the whole city is finally seen at once.

APPENDIX THE SECOND

A Note on the Forty-One Texts

This novella was composed from a body of forty-one earlier writings produced under the Surjan Super School and Hypostyle Press identity — atlases, novellas, studio briefs, and speculative architectural fables, all built on the twin doctrines of radical joy and radical preservation. The marvels named here first appeared, singly, in those earlier works; the present book is their reunion into one continuous, plotted story with a single recurring cast. Its house rules are constant across the whole body of work: EB Garamond and IBM Plex Mono; every drawing in the bright Public Lung dialect; every work attributed *Surjan, with the aid of Claude*.

APPENDIX THE THIRD

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a map of the city by its recurring words, that a reader may re-enter at any door

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Here ends *The City of Radical Joy*.

Surjan, with the aid of Claude.
Surjan Super School · Hypostyle Press.